The Shattered Clock

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The Shattered Clock

by Quietdahlia

Summary

Will Graham retires from the police force after a haunting encounter with a serial killer who suggests Will might be a lot darker than he thinks. Years later he is asked to consult for the FBI. There he meets psychiatrist Hannibal Lecter who takes an immediate interest in him.

[a retelling of how Hannibal and Will met set in an alternate universe where everything happens a little differently]

Prologue

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will took a deep breath before stepping out of his car onto the empty street. It was just after noon but it was a weekday and most of the residents were probably at work. When he looked out at the street he realized how poorly maintained it was. Lawns were overgrown and full of weeds and most of the houses looked as if they hadn't been lived in, in years. It was likely that many of them hadn't been.

He was here following a lead on a homicide case, more specifically a serial killer investigation. His first one ever. He had worked homicide for a few years now but only became a detective fairly recently and was eager to be working on such a high profile case.

The killer in question had murdered seven different people, bleeding them out over several days before disposing of the bodies in various alleyways around New Orleans. The bodies had been stabbed and cut all over and then the killer had used a tourniquet to ensure they wouldn't bleed out too quickly so that the process could be continued for days. This wasn't just murder. It was torture. The disposal of the bodies felt secondary to the actual act of torturing them. The killer didn't care about how they were found, the act of creating extreme fear was what excited him.

The victims were all various ages, genders, and races with seemingly nothing in common other than the fact they all had recently moved to the area and lived alone. Because of this detail Will spent a lot of time thinking about why the killer had targeted new residents in particular. There had to be a reason, there always was with serial killers.

He must have targeted single people who had recently moved because they didn't have many connections in the city yet. After all it was assumed that he held them somewhere and tortured them for days before he killed them due to the state of the bodies. If the victims didn't know many people, it was less likely that someone would report them missing until it was too late.

But this still left Will stumped on how exactly the killer found these victims. That was until he realized that people who were moving to a new city were always looking for new furniture and a great way to to find furniture for cheap was by looking on online marketplaces. These anonymous marketplaces were a way for a killer to meet up with unsuspecting victims. Facebook would allow the killer to cyber stalk their victims and quickly determine whether or not someone had recently moved to town, as well as whether or not they lived alone.

Will spent hours scouring Facebook marketplace noting down a few ads that looked suspicious until he found one that stuck out to him more than the others.

At first glance the ad didn't seem out of place. It was for a couch that looked like it was in great condition for only 50 dollars. This in itself wasn't inherently suspicious but the profile it linked back to was practically blank. No photos, videos, or even a profile picture was

attached to the account. Only a name. Ethan Smith. Combined with all the other details Will was almost certain the name was a fake.

It wasn't uncommon for Will to find details that others would miss. He often would pick up what others couldn't sometimes seemingly like magic. But it wasn't magic, the evidence was always there, he just interpreted it differently than everyone else.

Will created a fake account for himself, adding photos and friending a bunch of random people to make the profile look as real as possible before messaging the mysterious “Ethan Smith.” To Will’s surprise “Ethan” responded very quickly to the message and was eager to meet him as soon as possible. They worked out a time to meet and the seller gave him a home address to pick up the couch from.

The street was quiet and Will noticed how dilapidated almost all of the houses were. He was nearly certain that the house he was walking up to was long since abandoned. It looked as if it was melting or sinking into the earth. The roof was practically wilting and there were several patches missing shingles. There was no way it was up to code.

This was all but proof that the person waiting in the house was the killer Will was looking for. He quickly grabbed his police radio and called for backup. He knew he should just wait until backup got there before entering the house but curiosity got the best of him. Besides he was afraid the killer would spook if a bunch of police cars showed up on the street. And this could lead to a shootout or even suicide. Though if he was being honest with himself the reason Will didn't want any other cops around was because he was curious what would happen. He figured the police chief would reem him for it later but he knew he wasn't going to get into any real trouble.

He walked up the wooden porch steps which let out a series of creaks as if at any moment the porch was going to fall out from under him. He raised his hand to knock on the door before realizing it was already slightly ajar. Will drew his gun before slowly opening the door.

He was right about the building being abandoned, the entire entryway was empty except for an accumulation of cigarette butts, broken glass, and dirt that littered the floor. People had likely been squatting here before the serial killer scared them off. *Or killed them*. This thought made Will shiver.

He made his way through the main floor of the house checking each room finding them all empty. There was no furniture in any of the rooms and the house was devoid of anything that could possibly make it a home. Will could not imagine anyone living here. It felt dark and humid and the atmosphere sucked his energy like a vacuum.

Disappointment began to sink into Will as he realized that the man he was looking for might not even be here after all. *Great, after all of that there was no need to call for backup anyway*. But just as this thought crossed Wills mind he heard a loud crashing noise from the basement.

He whipped around, gun raised, to see the basement door was already open. When he walked through the door he noticed a sickly sweet foul odour and wondered how it hadn't caught his attention earlier. He pulled out a flashlight and slowly creeped down the stairs into the dark

basement. When he got to the bottom of the stairs he was able to find a cord dangling from the ceiling connected to a light. He pulled the cord reluctantly and a wash of light flooded the room. It wasn't bright enough to be able to see everything clearly but when Wills eyes adjusted to the room he gasped at what he saw.

A tall slender man with a sunken face and sparse facial hair stood over a table covered in knives, axes, and several other kinds of weapons. Some of the weapons were strewn across the floor and Will figured that this must've been the source of the crashing noise he heard upstairs. On the floor beside the man sat a metal chair that was completely covered in dried blood. The blood not only covered the chair but also the wooden floorboards surrounding it. Will's eyes met the killers and he almost gagged. It was if the creep could see right into his mind. He immediately averted his eyes, instead staring at the man's forehead.

“You must be the buyer” the man purred. “You know it would have been polite to at least knock.” He took a step towards Will, a hunting knife in his hand.

“Don't move” Will spat, pointing his gun at the figure. His hands were trembling but at least he had managed to keep his voice steady.

“You're not going to shoot me.” The man smiled as he took another step.

“What makes you say that?” Will asked, trying to make his voice sound flat and unaffected, his finger hovered over the trigger of his gun.

“Because you’re curious about me. You're not who people think you are, I can see it in your eyes.”

“Drop the knife Ethan.”

“My name isn't really Ethan you must know that. It's David. David Campbell. But I assume the name you gave me isn't your real name either. Now that we are getting to know each other I must ask, what is your name?”

The man took another step closer, toying with the blade in his hand as Will took a step backward dropping his eyes down to the blood soaked floor.

“Its Will. Will Graham but I’m not going to ask you again. Drop the knife and put your hands on your head.”

Suddenly, before Will could react the man lunged forward knocking them both to the ground. They wrestled for a moment before Will was pinned underneath David's weight. He had managed to keep hold of his gun in the altercation and was pressing it firmly against the killer's chest though for some reason he still couldn't shoot.

“What do you mean I’m not who people think I am?” Will looked at David’s chin to avoid those menacing eyes.

“You're like me aren't you officer?”

“I’m nothing like you” Will spat. Though he tried to fight it his eyes were drawn back into the dark pits of his attackers like a magnet. When their eyes met once more, Will got a pit deep in his stomach.

Empathy. Will thought to himself. *This killer has empathy like me*. That's how it seemed as if he could see into Will's soul. This realization sent him spinning. This killer could read people the way Will could. He could assume anyone's point of view. He could feel his victims fear as he killed them, he could experience every last ounce of their pain, and not only that but he enjoyed it. He was able to look into his victims eyes and understand them much the same as Will looked into his eyes and understood him.

“You are. And you would enjoy it too. Killing I mean. You would revel in it. You can't hide that from me the same way I can't hide it from you.”

Will heard shouting upstairs. Backup had finally arrived. “I… I wouldn't. I couldn't. How can you see someone, know them fully, and still kill them?”

“The same way you could. And you will. Someday.” David pressed his knee harder into Wills chest making it difficult for him to breathe. “Now it seems we don't have much time. What a shame. Now, I want you to remember this moment. Remember me.” David smiled slowly pressing his knife into Wills shoulder. At this Will screamed and officers started streaming down the stairs.

“You can’t escape who you are Will. No matter how much you run the darkness will always be there. I will always be there.” David stated, pulling the blade from Will's shoulder before bringing it down to the same spot once again tearing straight through tissue and embedding into bone. At that moment six or seven shots rang out and David's body fell next to him, eyes still trained on Wills.

“Someday you will see” David whispered only just loud enough for Will to hear before his body went limp beside him and the dark fire burning in his eyes was extinguished.

The last thing Will heard was an officer shouting for a medic before his vision went blank.

Chapter End Notes

Hello! I hope you found this first chapter interesting. It is just the prologue but the main story begins in the next chapter. I have not yet decided a schedule for releasing new chapters but I am already done the next one it just needs some revision so it should be out in a few days. This is gonna be a long one so be prepared. I am a full time university student who works part time so updates will in all likelihood depend on my schedule. I'm not a professional writer so I may have some small formatting or grammar errors here and there so bear with me if you can. I really appreciate anyone taking time out of their busy lives to read this!

Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will woke with a start, practically flying up from under his bedsheets. He was gasping for air, shaking with the ever present memory of David Campbell's knife in his shoulder. It had been nearly four years since that day in the dark basement but Will still managed to have nightmares about it semi regularly. He brought his hand to his shoulder feeling the thick bands of scar tissue where the knife had been to remind himself that David Campbell was dead and he had nothing to worry about. He didn't even work for the police force anymore.

Will had quit his detective job almost immediately after his close call with the serial killer. He knew he couldn't keep working as a police officer if he couldn't even shoot a man who stabbed him. How was he supposed to continue after that? If he couldn't shoot David, how could he know he wouldn't freeze up the next time something like this happened? His inability to pull the trigger could cost him his life or the life of one of his fellow officers and he was simply unwilling to risk that.

After he recovered from his stab wound Will had packed all of his belongings and fled Louisiana. He had needed a new scene. Somewhere that didn't remind him of David or the words he had spoken to him that day.

Will settled on Virginia as his new home and he had not looked back for a second. His life in Wolftrap was quiet and peaceful. He had six dogs and a lovely property with several acres of land, there was also a beautiful stream nearby where he could go fishing. Virginia was perfect in that it was absolutely nothing like Louisiana. The weather, culture, and political climate was so distinctly different.

He was also able to get a job teaching at the FBI academy which felt like a dream come true. It was the perfect way to continue to exercise his knowledge on forensics and psychology without having to commit to field work.

He looked at his clock and realized it was half an hour before his alarm would go off. There was no point in trying to get back to sleep now. He knew that if he tried he would just end up more tired and he still had a 45 minute drive ahead of him. Instead he grumbled before dragging himself the rest of the way out of bed. At this the dogs woke up too and ran towards him, tails wagging and noses pressed against his legs. He walked over to the door to let them outside and a gust of crisp fall wind hit him like a wall. At this point Will realized just how sweaty he was, his t-shirt almost entirely soaked. He peeled off the shirt, tossing it into the hamper before jumping into a steaming hot shower.

Will knew that it should concern him that he was still having nightmares about his stabbing years after it happened but there wasn't much he could do about it. If he brought it up to anyone they would tell him to try therapy and Will was absolutely not about to do that. Therapy wasn't going to work on him. He had majored in psychology in college and already knew all the tricks. Besides it's not like he would be able to tell any psychiatrist about what

was bouncing around his head anyway. The last time he had seen a psychiatrist was immediately after his altercation with David Campbell. He could only tell them half truths. It wasn't like there was anyone alive to contradict him and he knew there was no way he would've been able to secure his job at Quantico if they had known exactly what David had told him. He already couldn't even be considered an actual agent and was on pretty thin ice where his mental stability was concerned.

After his shower Will spent the rest of his morning cooking food for his dogs and notably nothing for himself. He fed all six dogs and let them out to pee one more time before heading off to work.

Will arrived at the academy thirty minutes before his class was supposed to start. He liked to come early so he didn't have to walk through the halls when they were super crowded. When he walked into his classroom he was surprised to see the figure of a dark haired woman with a black leather jacket leaning on his desk. She was leaning back with her arms crossed over a case file. He immediately recognized her as Beverly Katz, a forensic technician at the BAU. *So much for coming to school early to be alone*.

“Hey Will, I thought if I came early I might be able to catch you before your class” Beverly announced with a smirk. She always seemed to be in a relatively good mood for someone whos job it was to dissect murder victims. Will on the other hand was almost never in a good mood especially when someone caught him off guard so early in the morning.

“Well I guess you’ve caught me. What do you want?” Will shrugged looking at the ground. He wasn't exactly known for being polite which is a reputation he would like to uphold. If people didn't like him then they wouldn't bother him. But Beverly did not get the memo, or if she did she pretended she didn't.

“I have a case I want you to look at. We could really use your input. You always have a way with these kinds of things.” She was right of course. This wasn't the first time Beverly had found her way to Wills classroom looking for help on a case and he was always willing to help her even if it took some convincing. In fact Beverly had formed a habit of consulting Will with any high profile case that came to her. He didn't really know why this was. It's not like he could solve the case for her on the spot. Typically Will would look at a case, make a profile, and hopefully point her in the right direction. Most of the heavy lifting was still done by forensics, he just sped up the process a little bit.

“Alright. What have you got?” Will asked as Beverly passed him the manila case file. He honestly really liked helping with the cases. It made him feel useful, like he was actually doing something with his talents.

“Serial arsonist. He locks his victims in their houses and then burns them down while they are asleep. So far we can link three fires to this killer. He broke into the homes and tampered with their smoke detectors before pouring gasoline across the floor. Eight people were killed with no survivors.”

“Leave me with the file and I’ll tell you what I think this afternoon after I’m done teaching.”

“Great! Meet me at the lab whenever you're ready. Thank you for the help.” With that Beverly stood up and walked out of the classroom giving Will a nod as she walked by him.

There wasn't enough time before class for Will to get a good look at the file so he tucked it into one of his desk drawers. Luckily he didn't have any lectures after lunch and could dedicate the rest of his afternoon to the case if he needed to.

After class Will waited for all of the trainees to exit the classroom before locking the door and grabbing the case file from his desk. He didn't want any interruptions while he did his work and knowing his luck, some boisterous trainee (or forensic technician) would barge into his classroom when he was in the middle of visualizing the crime.

He read the file front to back and looked at the charred corpses of the men, women, and children before setting it down on his desk. Dead bodies had never really bothered Will. Maybe it was because he spent so long working in homicide, he was probably just desensitized. He closed his eyes and took a deep breath watching the pendulum swing back and forth across the back of his eyelids.

I break into the Coopers family home late into the night when I know they will all be asleep. I brought two full gas cans with me. I know the layout of the home. I’ve been here before. Quietly I take out the batteries of the smoke alarms. I leave a trail of gasoline from the parents bedroom to the nursery and then into the kitchen and finally pour out the rest of the gas in the living room. I pile furniture in front of every possible exit except for the front door. I strike a match and toss it onto the floor before exiting. I wait close by the house to hear the screams of the family inside as I listen to them burn. This is my design.

Will opened his eyes to find himself back in his classroom. He blinked a few times to make sure his surroundings were real before picking up the case file once again. It wasn't unusual for him to get lost in recreating crime scenes, in fact this is what made him so good at what he did. That didn't mean that it didn't take a toll on him each time he did this. He would always take a little piece of the killers with him every time he got into their heads. Sometimes he would even lose sight of where his own thoughts ended and where the killers began.

He grabbed his belongings and headed over to the building that housed the BAU and the lab that he was supposed to meet Beverly in.

When he walked into the lab he saw two men in long white lab coats arguing over a body. Beverly was standing a few steps away, her eyes trained on a computer screen, completely oblivious to his entrance.

“I’m telling you it was the ex wife. Her fingerprints are on his glasses!” The older of the two men said, waving his hand around to emphasize his point.

“No way. She is 5’2” this man is 6’4” and was beaten to death. It had to have been a man. Or if the ex wife did do it she didn't do it alone” the other man exclaimed before he finally noticed Will standing awkwardly in the corner. “Wait… who are you?” the younger of the two asked. Beverly looked up at Will and smiled.

“This is Will Graham. He's helping me out with that arsonist case I was working on. Did you find anything?” Beverly asked. The two men glanced at each other before looking to Will.

Will's eyes wandered down to his shoes and then up to the space right next to Beverly's head before he answered.

“The guy you are looking for has been in each of the homes before. He could be a family friend or more likely a tradesman. Check to see if the families had any plumbing or electrical work done in the weeks before they were killed.”

“And how do you know he had been in the house before? I’ve looked through that file front to back half a dozen times and there is no proof the killer would have known the layout of the homes.” The younger of the two male technicians said smugly. Will shot him a dirty look out the corner of his eye before bringing his gaze to the beaten corpse on the table. He crossed his arms awkwardly before realizing how weird it was that he was staring at a corpse. He shifted his eyes to the space between the arguing technicians, a much more normal place to be looking.

“He was able to locate all of the smoke alarms without waking anyone up. He also knew where each of the doors and windows that he needed to block off were. He isn't confident enough to wing it and enter a house without having visited it at least once before.” Will didn't really have enough evidence to explain that last point but he knew it to be true. This killer was quiet. He wasn't noticed in his day to day routine. He was unassuming and probably polite. There was no way he would have been confident enough to break into a house without already knowing the layout.

“Alright I’ll be sure to check it out. This case has been cold for months. At this point I’m willing to follow any lead I get” Beverly admitted. Will looked over and saw her give him a small smile. “By the way, that's Jimmy and this is Brian. Don’t take them too seriously.”

“Heyyy” both men whined before once again getting distracted by the corpse, this time with Beverly weighing in on the argument. Will took this opportunity to sneak out of the lab. He had already told them everything could about the case and at this point he just wanted to get home unnoticed.

A few days later, Will was organizing his things after class and preparing to go home for the day after school. There were still a few students filing out of the classroom so he wasn't in any particular rush.

“Mr. Graham” bellowed a man Will recognized from the BAU. He flicked his eyes up at the man, saying nothing before resuming placing his laptop in his book bag. “Special Agent Jack Crawford. I head the behavioural science unit” the man continued unfazed by Wills lack of response.

“I know we’ve met” Will muttered without looking up from his task. He had no interest in talking to anyone right now, especially not Jack Crawford. Their only previous meeting

hadn’t exactly been pleasant. Not that Will’s interactions were usually pleasant, he had a habit of being extremely awkward which often made people uncomfortable.

“Yes. We had a disagreement when we opened up the museum.” Jack stated. Will pushed his glasses up on the bridge of his nose. He really did not want to be rehashing this conversation right now.

“I disagreed with what you named it” he responded, moving his eyes up to Jack's face for a brief moment before looking back down at his desk.

“The Evil Minds Research Museum” Jack shot him a look but Will kept his eyes focused on his bookbag pretending not to notice.

“A little hammy don’t you think Jack?” Will looked up, focusing on the bridge of Jack's nose. This was as close to eye contact as he was comfortable getting. The corners of Jack’s mouth turned up, he was clearly amused by Will’s attempts to get him to leave.

“My team has been particularly efficient in solving cases lately.”

“Congratulations” Will rolled his eyes. He knew exactly what game Jack was playing and he was not going to play along.

“Turns out it's not my team that deserves the congratulations. It’s you.” Will figured that this would come eventually. Afterall he wasn't an official consultant and Beverly Katz really shouldn't have been sharing sensitive information with him. He just hoped that Beverly wouldn’t get in trouble for any of this.

“I didn't solve the cases Jack I simply read through the files and gave my opinion. That's it.” Will huffed loudly and put his book bag on his desk with a loud clunk to demonstrate his dissatisfaction with the conversation.

“I’ve looked into you Will. I hear you can empathize with killers, narcissists, and sociopaths.” Jack clamped his hand on Wills shoulder, causing him to shrug it off with discomfort. He looked up, this time at Jack's forehead.

“I can empathize with anybody. I have an overactive imagination.” Ignoring his earlier discomfort Jack put his hand on Wills shoulder again this time in a way that he couldn't easily shake off. Will looked down meeting Jack’s stare.

“Can I borrow your imagination?”

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Hannibal heard a knock on his door which was odd considering he didn't have any more patients today. He assumed a patient had messed up the date or maybe thought they had forgotten something in his office. Instead he opened his door to see a man wearing a suit. The suit was not as nice as his own of course but instead the kind thing he would expect a

government worker to wear. *Something a federal agent might wear*. This thought sounded alarm bells in his brain but he did not let this show on his face.

“Doctor Lecter, I’m Special Agent Jack Crawford. FBI” the man pulled out his FBI credentials letting Hannibal look over them for a moment before returning them back to his jacket pocket. “May I come in?”

“Please do.” Hannibal replied, opening the door wide enough and stepping inside to let the agent inside. Jack walked into the office and was clearly taken aback by the grandiosity of it. His eyes flitted around the room from the drawings on the desk to the huge collection of books above. Hannibal cursed himself internally realizing that he had carelessly left his drawings out for Agent Crawford to see, one of which being the wound man. This wouldn’t normally be a problem as the wound man was common enough in medical texts, except Hannibal had brought the portrait to life in one of his previous tableaus. If Jack was here to question him about the Chesapeake Ripper, he would almost certainly recognize the wound man. “May I ask what brings you here?”

“You can ask but I’m going to have to ask you a few questions first.” Jack replied with a smile. Hannibal smiled back at him though he was not at all amused.

The FBI wouldn't be so bold as to send a single agent after him if they knew what he was, well at least not again. No, it was more likely Agent Crawford was simply here on an unrelated case. Still, it made him uneasy to have an FBI agent in his office especially after the last one had so easily deduced what he was.

“You, uh, expecting another patient?”

“We’re all alone.” Hannibal replied. Jack walked over to the drawing table with Hannibal following close behind. He started leafing through the pages and Hannibal could see the edge of his drawing of the wound man. If he was caught this way for a second time he would never forgive himself.

“These yours doctor?”

“Yes”

“The amount of detail is incredible.” Jack said in awe as he focused on the drawing of Hannibal's old boarding school in Paris.

“I learned very early that a scalpel cuts better points than a pencil sharpener.” Hannibal picked up the scalpel. It would be good to have a weapon handy if Jack noticed the wound man peeking out from underneath the drawing of the boarding school. *Maybe I should just kill him now to get it over with*. No, that was a bad idea, Jack had likely told someone where he was going and if he turned up dead Hannibal would be the first suspect. Instead he would try and determine why exactly an FBI agent, especially such a high ranking one was in his office. “I’m beginning to think you are investigating me, Agent Crawford” Hannibal stated. Jack laughed at this notion.

“No, no. You were referred to me by Alana Bloom” Jack replied. At this Hannibal let out a little sigh and placed his scalpel back on the desk.

“May I ask what for?”

“I have been looking for someone to help me work on a psychological profile and you came very highly recommended. I read your paper, Evolutionary Origins of Social Exclusion. Very interesting, and brilliant work.” This made Hannibal smile genuinely and he was very grateful that he had decided not to kill Jack Crawford moments earlier. Working with the FBI could prove to be very interesting, not to mention it may let him observe the investigation into his own crimes.

“Tell Dr. Bloom I am very grateful for her recommendation. And of course I would be honoured to help the FBI out with whatever they ask of me.”

“I’m glad to hear it. Just between you and me, while consulting on this case I also want you keeping an eye on another consultant of mine. He’s brilliant and has the rare gift of pure empathy. He’s able to see into killers minds and he solves cases a lot faster than anyone else I’ve ever met. But I’m worried about him. I think he might be unstable. I need you to let me know whether or not I can trust him to do fieldwork.” This piqued Hannibal's curiosity; he had heard of empathy disorders similar to what Jack was describing but had never had the opportunity to meet someone with the condition. He was not even sure if such a condition even existed, but if it did he just had to see it for himself.

“Of course. And what is this profiler's name?”

“Will Graham.”

Chapter End Notes

The next chapter should come out sometime this weekend. My updates should continue fairly frequently but will likely slow down in April because of exams!

Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“I really don’t think Will is ready for fieldwork Jack.” Alana stated, shifting anxiously in her seat, crossing and then uncrossing her legs. She didn't know Will extremely well, but she could very easily determine sending him out in the field would not be good for anyone. Will had quit his job as a detective days after his traumatic experience in Louisiana and moved halfway across the country soon after. She didn’t have to be a professional to know it was likely that Will had never resolved his trauma.

“He told me he was fine” Jack commented, brushing off her concern with a flick of his wrist.

“What he told you and what is the truth are likely two very different things.” Alana retaliated letting some emotion creep into her voice. She didn’t mean for her emotions to get the best of her, but she couldn’t help it. Alana had only ever talked to Will in a professional setting but she still really cared about him. He had a bit of a rough exterior but she knew underneath all the awkwardness and the avoidance he was hurting.

Jack sighed before placing both hands on the desk in front of him. Alana knew he wouldn’t yell at her. Jack respected her too much, even if they almost never agreed.

“Will Graham has done nothing to indicate to me that he is not perfectly capable of handling this. Besides I won’t be sending him in alone. I spoke with that psychiatrist you recommended to me, Dr. Lecter, and he said he was willing to observe Will to determine whether or not he is fit to be doing field work.”

“And why can't you trust my opinion on this matter? I am just as qualified as Dr. Lecter.” Alana retaliated.

“I don’t trust you to have objectivity when it comes to Will Graham. I want someone who has had no prior relationship with him. I appreciate your conviction Dr. Bloom, but Will is going to be consulting for me unless he or Dr. Lecter indicates to me that he should not be.”

Alana nodded, looking down at her well manicured hands. Jack might be right. Besides, Hannibal was a brilliant psychiatrist and she trusted him to be able to make an accurate judgement about Will.

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It had been nearly three weeks after Jack and Will’s conversation in his classroom. Will’s nights seemed to consist of constant nightmares, and when he wasn’t dreaming he was lying awake thinking.

It wasn’t a surprise to him that his dreams would become more frequent after he had talked to Jack. It was like his mind was warning him not to go back to fieldwork.

At this point he assumed that Jack had changed his mind about "borrowing his imagination." He wouldn't be surprised if Alana had talked Jack out of letting him consult, she had expressed this sentiment to Will earlier this week after he nearly ran right into her on his way to class. Will tended to do this a lot as he had a bad habit of staring at the ground while he walked. But Alana hadn't commented on his clumsiness and had instead jumped straight into discussing Will's possible consulting job.

"So a little birdie tells me you were considering joining Jack's behavioural analysis team" she had said while looking up at him from underneath her eyelashes, pushing back a long dark curl behind her ear.

"Thinking about it" Will smiled looking down at her ankles which were neatly tucked into a pair of heels.

"Are you sure you're ready? You haven't been out in the field in a really long time Will. There is no shame in telling Jack no."

"I know. I really think I'm ready. If I wasn't I wouldn't have agreed to it." This was technically a lie. Will probably wasn't ready to get back out there but if he didn't try now the opportunity would probably never come up again.

"Okay well if you ever want to talk…" Alana started before Will cut her off.

"Thank you. I will." Alana had smiled and gave Will a small nod before continuing down the hall.

Will had always admired her, after all she was an undeniably beautiful and intelligent woman. In fact he often caught himself thinking about her at various times throughout the week. But he also couldn't stand the pity he saw in her eyes whenever she looked at him. Alana saw Will as fragile, someone who might crack if she looked at him the wrong way. Whenever people learned about his history with David Campbell they tended to look at him like that. Like he was a small bird with a broken wing. If anything he preferred Jack's oblivious approach over Alana's.

Jack didn't treat Will like he was some kind of damaged goods. He treated him just like he did any other of his employees which was something Will respected, though he had to admit that Jack had a tendency to disregard boundaries.

Suddenly a buzzing sound broke Will from his thoughts. It was his cellphone. *Now where is the damn thing?* Will flew through his house like a tornado checking under pillows and couch cushions until he found it laying under his bed. Of course he had no idea how it had gotten there but he figured the dogs had something to do with it. When he looked down at the caller ID screen it read JACK CRAWFORD.

"Hey Jack, what can I do for you" Will greeted, panting into the phone slightly due to his exertion in looking for it.

"Hello Will, I'm calling to let you know I have a case for you. If you are still interested in consulting that is." Jack was trying to test the waters. Giving Will an easy out if he needed

one. But Will didn't need an out, he was determined to go through with this. He couldn't just keep living his life in fear, it was time to get back in the saddle. Maybe the best way to get David Campbell out of his head was to move forward.

"Yeah, I'm still interested."

"Great. But I must warn you, I'm not starting you off easy Will. This one is pretty gruesome."

"I worked homicide, remember? I've seen it all."

"You haven't seen this," Jack uttered ominously before giving him the address.

Will arrived at the crime scene about an hour after the call with Jack. The address Jack gave him was for an old hiking trail. The forest was so thick Will thought he was going the wrong way twice when stumbling through the tall weeds and bushes before he came across the yellow crime scene tape. He pulled out his temporary identification badge from the FBI and the officer guarding the scene lifted the tape for him to walk under.

It was a miracle any bodies were ever found here. Even though the hiking trail was relatively busy most days, the bodies were about 100 meters off the path and he couldn't imagine anyone walking off the trail due to the sheer density of the underbrush.

In his brief journey to the crime scene he had already scraped himself twice on thorny plants. *I hope those weren't poison ivy* he thought to himself. It's not like Will wasn't used to forests, he had to walk through a similar one in Wolftrap to go fishing in the stream, but he really didn't need to get a weird rash on his first day consulting at FBI crime scenes.

He walked a few meters before spotting Jack. Their eyes briefly met before Will quickly looked away, awkwardly pushing his glasses up on his nose.

"Prepare yourself" Jack suggested in a calm but firm voice. Will nodded without looking up. He trudged down a small slope towards the group of forensic technicians who were busy leaning over and taking photos. He gulped. Jack had been right, never in his life had Will seen anything like this.

Nine bodies were laid out next to nine shallow graves. They were extremely pale and each of them were in various stages of decay, but that wasn't the most interesting thing about them. All of the bodies were covered nearly head to toe in *mushrooms*. This was no accident. These mushrooms were cultivated, grown with extreme care and consideration.

"They were buried in a high nutrient compost, likely of his own making. He was enthusiastically encouraging decomposition" a familiar voice spoke. Will looked over and saw Beverly Katz kneeling next to one of the bodies wearing her signature leather Jacket and an identification badge dangling from her neck. He pressed his lips together to form a little smile of acknowledgement before returning his gaze to the mushroom infested body in front of him.

“They were buried alive with the intention of keeping them that way, well at least for a little while” the technician Will immediately recognized as Brian Zeller from the day he talked to Beverly about the serial arsonist, announced.

“Long enough for the fungus to eat away any distinguishing characteristics” the other technician he met that day, Jimmy Price, shot back.

“Line and rebar were used to administer intravenous fluids after they were buried,” Beverly added.

This must have been a huge undertaking. The killer would have had to come back and check on the bodies frequently to ensure they were not found by animals. Not only that but the creation of the compost mixture, cleaning the breathing tubes, and care for the mushrooms must have been a tedious task. But not for this killer. No, every painstaking hour spent on the care of these mushrooms was all part of his design.

“Can I have a moment alone?” Will asked, looking at Jack. His best work was done when he was completely alone. The less distractions the better, even if some couldn’t be helped due to the nature of a forest.

“Well you heard the man. Everybody clear out” Jack boomed, sending the lab technicians scrambling. Jack was pretty intimidating, he wasn't going to have to tell anyone twice.

Will took a deep breath losing himself in the sounds of birds chirping and leaves rattling in the distance. He imagined what it would have been like to bury the bodies and care for them in the silence of the forest. It must have been calming for the killer, feeling like he was one with nature as he buried his victims so they actually would be. They would rot, delicately and beautifully sinking into and then becoming the earth below.

He was giving them a gift. Allowing them to be in perfect harmony before their deaths, without a care in the world. This gardener gave his victims what he wanted most of all *connection*.

Will knew that fungi could accomplish a certain level of connection. They are built up of small threadlike structures known as mycelium that form a network not too dissimilar to that of neurons in the human brain. These networks were able to connect miles of organisms into one massive living entity.

The killer so desperately wanted this connection and the only way he knew how to do it was through the expansive network of mycelium.

He was isolated and incredibly lonely but anytime he reached out to anyone they would push him away. He was most definitely single and probably had been alone his entire life. No one with caring friends and family would be able to do this. No this killer was so undeniably and totally alone and probably had never formed a real bond with anyone.

If he ever had parents they were certainly neglectful and withheld any kind of love from him. The only way he knew how to reach out was through his garden. Through the cultivation of his magnificent crop he was finally able to feel the unconditional love he had always craved.

This love was practically bleeding out of every molecule of dirt beneath Will's feet. He could imagine what it would have felt like to place every tube and examine the caps on each of the mushrooms. He could practically feel the mycelium reach out to him.

A warm feeling washed over Will as he felt exactly like how the killer would have felt in the presence of his garden.

"Will… Will are you okay?" Jack asked.

Will practically leapt out of his skin. He took a couple of quick breaths before realizing he had a shit eating grin plastered across his face.

Who smiles at a crime scene?

"Sorry, I got lost for a second there" Will murmured under his breath, wiping his hand over his face.

"Well it's time to head back to Quantico, if you're done here of course. There is someone I would like you to fill in the details for" Jack stated.

It was clear Jack was ready to leave and at this point so was Will. He had fallen a little too far into the killer's mind and needed to be reigned back in.

Will knew that this would happen when he took the job. His empathy didn't just allow him to imagine how the killers thought, he could also feel how they felt. For a brief moment he would lose himself to this feeling. This happened every time Will had ever visited a crime scene, it's what made him so good at what he does but it also made him dangerous. If he could enjoy feeling like a killer, what stopped him from becoming one? That question had haunted him ever since he met David Campbell.

"How come they aren't here?" Will asked, curious about this mysterious person apparently working the case that Jack had failed to mention up until this point.

"Dr. Lecter was unable to make it to the crime scene, he had patients he couldn't cancel on so last minute. Unfortunately he will just have to rely on pictures."

Will tilted his head down in acknowledgement. Another psychiatrist, *great*. He had a sinking feeling that Jack had hired this doctor to watch him and determine whether he was sane or not. Probably Alana's idea. To be fair he couldn't exactly blame Jack for worrying after he caught him smiling like a maniac in front of nine dead bodies.

"Alright, I guess I'll meet you there then" Will stated before walking back over to the crime scene tape.

A small crowd had gathered at the edge of the police line and the officer guarding it had to shoo them away to let Will through. A woman with flaming red curls tried to get his attention but he ignored her and marched straight to his car.

Will hated attention. He had forgotten about the constant barrage of reporters swirling around crime scenes demanding answers. It was bad enough when he worked homicide in New

Orleans but he could guess it would be a lot worse at FBI crime scenes.

Will spent the entire car ride to Quantico in silence without so much as even turning on the radio. It would be better if he was just allowed to go home. He was much too drained to be meeting someone new for the first time, especially someone he might have to continue working with. Will could be awkward and avoidant at the best of times so having a killer lurking in the back of his mind would undoubtedly make this problem worse. This would likely be a recurring theme if he continued to work for the behavioural science division, so he might as well get it over with. Yeah, he might come off as a little rude, but what's the worst thing that could happen?

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After Jack left Hannibal's office the first thing he did was settle down at his desk with his tablet. He did this fairly frequently. As embarrassing as it was, he spent a lot of time reading true crime tabloids and more often than not the source he read them from was Tattlecrime.com. These articles were commercial, flashy, and offensive to read. But despite their negative qualities they were also the fastest and most reliable way to stay up to date on true crime cases.

Well reliable was a stretch. Freddie Lounds, the writer for Tattlecrime, had a tendency to exaggerate details and spin outrageous theories in order to make the most entertaining stories for her eager readers. Hannibal typically ignored her analysis and simply focused on the physical proof and evidence she efficiently gathered.

Freddie Lounds was often the first person on the scene of a crime and was occasionally able to post an article before the police were even called. She was able to take photos and document the crime scene before it was disturbed.

These articles provided him insight on the investigation and public reception of his own murders as well as other prominent killers in the country.

But this time he was not just searching Tattlecrime. No today he was looking for any information he could find on Will Graham. Jack's brief description of the man made Hannibal exceptionally curious and he just had to find out everything there was to know about him before they met.

He was always fascinated by people whose brains work differently from most. It is part of the reason he ended up choosing psychiatry over other medical fields.

Hannibal had several patients over the years with the sort of unique mind he was looking for. He was always curious what he could make these people do if he applied the right amount of pressure.

People were not so rigid as to fit into categories such as "good" and "bad" and Hannibal found that he could make almost anyone do unspeakable things and have them believe they were justified in doing so. It was like a game to him.

When he typed Mr. Graham's name into the search bar dozens of articles came up. He clicked on the first article titled *Detective Escapes Notorious Serial Killer*. When the article loaded, a picture of a stunning man with shaggy brown hair and piercing blue eyes showed up on his screen.

The man didn't initially seem like anything special. Yes, he was conventionally attractive but in a plain sort of way. This wasn't the kind of person one would pick out in a crowd. From a quick glance he seemed outrageously normal, and therefore boring. Hannibal however, saw something in him. Even from just a picture he could tell this man was hiding something. From his posture to his choice in clothes, this was a man who did not want to be noticed. But Hannibal noticed. *This must be Will Graham*, he thought.

The article described an incident in Louisiana where Mr. Graham went to question someone in the investigation of a series of murders in the area. Graham was attacked by the killer and stabbed twice, barely escaping with his life. At first glance the article wasn't particularly interesting. After all it wasn't really that uncommon for an officer to be injured in the line of duty, especially one that was reckless enough to go into a serial killer's den without backup.

But the more he thought about it, the more interested Hannibal became. There were so many unanswered questions. Why didn't David Campbell kill Will Graham? He didn't seem to have any remorse for his other victims and according to the article Mr. Graham was alone with him for around ten minutes. This was plenty enough time to eliminate the officer and still have a fighting chance of escaping the authorities. So why didn't he? What could possibly cause a ruthless killer to spare a policeman? And on that same note, why didn't Mr. Graham shoot Campbell? None of the reports indicated that he didn't have a gun. Hannibal knew there had to be more to this seemingly innocent detective than meets the eye.

Will Graham was a puzzle that Hannibal was eager to solve. He hadn't found such an interesting specimen in what felt like years and he very much hoped that this wouldn't be another let down.

It was becoming much too easy for him to decipher people. But this empathy disorder Jack had mentioned could prove to be a new and interesting challenge for Hannibal to maneuver.

It was several days before he finally got the call from Jack to let him know there was a case for him.

He thought about cancelling his afternoon patients before realizing that it would seem much too eager for him to do so, and frankly, it would be rude to cancel so short notice when he had established his cancelation policy as a 24 hour one. Besides the extra few hours would allow him to spend more time thinking about what he should wear.

He did not want to come across too intimidating to either Jack or Will in order to build their trust. Because of this his usual taste in fashion would have to be put aside for now, or at least until he could slowly get them accustomed to it. This meant that a three piece suit would not be an option.

After going back and forth for some time he chose a neutral toned blazer over a sweater with a collared shirt underneath and decidedly no tie. This was much more casual than he was

typically comfortable with, though it would achieve its intended purpose.

Hannibal adjusted his jacket before reaching up to knock on the office door.

When the door opened he saw a slightly older version of the man from the picture he had so meticulously studied. He was wearing a flannel shirt and jeans, this definitely fit Hannibal's perception of him as a man who did not want to stand out.

Will did not look up at him when Jack opened the door, and was instead staring down at his hands which were folded in his lap.

"I hope I am not late, the traffic from Baltimore is quite busy at this time of day."

Jack Crawford glanced down at his watch, a plain relatively looking digital thing he had probably owned for years.

"Hello Dr. Lecter, you're right on time" Jack replied with a smile.

Hannibal nodded before stepping into the office. He noted that there weren't many decorations around except for a small portrait of Jack's wife sitting on the desk. Everything else in the office seemed to be there in order to serve some kind of utilitarian purpose.

This wasn't at all surprising, Jack did not seem to be the kind of man who cared about making his space look presentable. It was clean and organized and that's all that really mattered.

"This is Agent Will Graham, he will be helping me take you through the case."

Hannibal stepped over to shake Will's hand before pulling up a chair to sit next to him at the desk.

When their hands met, he looked up at Will's face hoping to catch a glimpse of his piercing blue eyes. Instead Will looked down at his shoes.

"Jack and I briefly discussed a few details of the case over the phone. He mentioned a garden filled with victims who were buried alive." Hannibal stated, still looking at the quiet man sitting beside him who was now fidgeting with his glasses.

"Yes. The uh, bodies were used kind of like fertilizer. He was growing mushrooms" Will added, lifting his eyes to Hannibals face, though still not meeting his eyes.

"There were nine victims, each buried only a few inches underground without any kind of restraints. They were hooked up to IV's to feed them nutrients as well as small breathing tubes for oxygen" Jack rattled off, handing Hannibal the case file.

He slowly looked through the pages in the file. Growing mushrooms was a bit of an understatement. These bodies were practically infested with them.

"Are these mushrooms a local variety?" Hannibal asked.

“Looks like it,” Jack answered.

“The killer specifically chose this kind of mushroom because he knew it wouldn’t damage the local ecosystem. He cares about the environment,” Will added.

This killer was not as artful as Hannibal, though he could appreciate part of that was because he had not intended for his victims to be found. They were meant to remain hidden and were for the killers eyes only.

“If he was so intent on keeping his victims alive, why were each of them found dead at the scene?” Hannibal asked, directing his question at Will.

“It is less about the people and more about what they represent. He doesn’t care about who they were before, it’s about what they can become.” Will said this with confidence, as if it was obvious.

“And what might that be?” Hannibal leaned in a little, curious as to what Will would say. Unfortunately right at that moment a loud buzzing sound interrupted them.

“I’m so sorry I have to take this. You two can continue on without me” Jack grumbled before taking his cellphone out of his pocket and leaving the room.

Will watched Jack leave and then looked down at the desk with a little exhale. It was clear he had no interest being here, especially not with Hannibal.

Hannibal did not mind Will’s lack of interest. He had always prided himself in being a patient man and this would be no exception. If he was right about Will he knew in time the man would become curious about him.

“He’s looking for connection. He’s reaching out the only way he knows how” Will answered after Jack's office door swung closed.

“As humans we are profoundly shaped by our social connections and we suffer greatly when we are unable form these bonds or they are otherwise broken, particularly at a young age.” Will thought about this for a second and then nodded.

“The root of much of human suffering is caused by a severed connection that was never repaired” Will replied.

This was true. A certain level of social interaction was needed to keep happy and healthy. This is why Hannibal frequently had dinner parties and went out on many social ventures. He would admit however all of these connections were surface level as it was very rare for Hannibal to actually let someone know him.

“Without friends, family, and loved ones, how can someone be expected to wade through the trials that life brings? It could drive them to looking for this missing piece in unconventional places.”

“That kind of loneliness could drive someone to kill,” Will murmured in agreement.

Hannibal had to repress the urge to smile at this. Will was very perceptive.

“Perhaps” he responded with a small nod. Will was looking up at Hannibal, still not quite meeting his eyes. “Not fond of eye contact, are you?” he questioned.

“Eyes are distracting” Will shrugged, shifting backwards in his seat, looking at the clock on the wall, likely anxious to have this conversation be over.

“Eyes are the window to the soul. When you look into someone's eyes do you see their soul? Or are you worried that they might see yours? That they might be afraid of what they see.”

Will’s eyes widened at this and met Hannibal’s for a brief exhilarating moment before looking away again. The muscles in his face went limp for a moment before tightening. Hannibal had clearly struck a nerve, which was exactly what he intended to do.

“Who’s profile are you working on?” Will stammered, his ears turning pink.

“I’m sorry Will, but observing is what we do. I can’t shut mine off any more than you can shut yours off.”

“I knew it. Jack hired you to keep tabs on me. To make sure I’m not going to go insane after starting fieldwork again. You could have at least been more discreet about it,” Will snapped.

“On the contrary he hired me to work on profiling serial murderers. Though I must confess he did want me to ensure you were competent enough for fieldwork.”

“And what are you going to tell him?”

It was clear Will was agitated at the ambush but he was trying to push the anger out of his voice as much as he could. In all likelihood he was doing this for his own sake rather than Hannibals. After all Hannibal did have the power over whether or not he would get to keep his job.

“I’m not sure yet. Though, you have a very perceptive mind Mr. Graham. I am quite confident you would make an excellent addition to Jack Crawford’s team.” This pacified Will just a little bit as Hannibal could see his jaw unclench and his muscles start to relax slightly.

Just then, Jack walked back into the office.

“Sorry for the interruption, I hope you got along well enough without me.”

Jack marched back to his desk and sat in his chair, looking back and forth between the two men in front of him.

“This killer is a white male, middle aged or maybe slightly older than that. He is single and has never been married. I doubt he has any previous record. This is a lonely and quiet man. Someone who speaks softly and goes through life unnoticed,” Will told Jack.

“And when can I expect a full profile?” Jack questioned.

“The day after tomorrow” Will said plainly before standing up and grabbing his coat. “I have to get going, my dogs need to be let out. I've been gone all day.”

Wait dogs as in plural?

Hannibal grimaced at the thought. He didn’t exactly hate pets, but dogs in particular had a foul odour he could not stand.

“And Jack” Will started, “if you didn’t think I was ready for fieldwork you could have just told me instead of hiring some psychiatrist to keep an eye on me.” With that, Will practically stormed out of the room.

The corners of Hannibal's mouth turned up. Normally he couldn’t stand any sort of discourtesy. But when these words tumbled out of Will’s mouth in particular, he found them absolutely fascinating.

Chapter End Notes

I know this was a day later than I planned but I wanted to make it a little longer. Next update should be out around Friday!

Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will drove home frustrated the whole way. He considered quitting his consulting gig just to spite Jack but thought better of it. He didn't really feel like going back to teaching full time anymore. Doing fieldwork was substantially more interesting and made him feel like he was actually making a difference in the world.

Teaching was a good job and he really did like it but he knew he could save more lives by working with Jack. Will knew Jack knew that as well, or else he never would have let a slightly unstable teacher into the field. Besides he was still teaching part time and would have that to fall back on should everything else fail.

There was also the problem of Dr. Lecter and his psychoanalytical ambush, but that was something Will figured he could work through. It wasn't exactly the first time a psychological professional had taken an interest in him after hearing about his empathy.

But he had been the first person to look at Will and immediately see the darkness that lingered inside him.

Well not the first.

The only other person to see through Will's towering forts before that had been David Campbell. But Campbell had been able to read him because of their shared empathy, and Will was quite certain that Dr. Lecter didn't have this gift.

No, the doctor was only able to read him so easily because of the conversation they had. When they conversed, it was as if they were not just talking about the mushroom farmer, but also Will himself. Thinking back on it, this was probably done on purpose. He would have to be a little more careful next time they spoke. Will really didn't need anyone learning just how big of an impact jumping into the minds of killers had on him.

When he got home he quickly fed and walked the dogs before collapsing into bed. It wasn't very late but he had an exhausting day.

Not long after drifting off, for the second time that day Will found himself in a forest.

Except this time it was much warmer outside. Maybe spring or early summer.

The plants were covered in a light layer of dew, and when he breathed in Will could smell the damp soil. The morning sun seemed to fill him with a sense of warmth all the way to his core. He could hear the distant sounds of birds chirping and bugs buzzing around his ears.

When he looked down he saw that he was shoveling dirt into a hole. But this wasn't just any hole, it was a grave, and in it lay the unconscious body of a middle aged man. He wasn't

disturbed by this though, and continued to fill in the hole.

He had to be careful as not to disturb the IV or breathing tube he had placed so this meant it would take much longer.

He didn't mind. It was all part of the process. The garden was more important. If he rushed through his work he may not be able to enjoy the fungi to their fullest extent and then all this work would have been for nothing.

When he finished, Will stepped back to admire his handiwork.

He watched as out of thin air mushrooms started to grow from the soil he just placed. This wasn't right. It should be weeks before he saw these kinds of results.

Wait what am I doing?

Suddenly the air started to grow much colder and Will realized exactly what he had done and *enjoyed*.

The pleasant sounds and smells of the forest faded away and even the breeze went still.

The forest grew darker around him as he stumbled backwards in shock. Something grabbed his ankle and he fell into another empty grave paralyzed with fear.

Rotting hands reached out from underneath the dirt and held him down.

He heard footsteps next to him but when he tried to look up he found he was unable to move.

The figure knelt down beside him, but Will still couldn't see his face.

"You're not who people think you are," David Campbell's words echoed through the still air.

Will tried to speak, to say he would never do anything like this, but the words got stuck in his throat.

The figure grabbed the shovel and started to pour dirt into the grave. His vision slowly started to fade as the sounds of the shoveling became more and more distant.

When Will opened his eyes he didn't know where he was. He was freezing, dressed only in his sleep shirt and underwear. He was shaking and had to gasp a few times to ground himself back to reality. The air was just as cold as it had been in his dream but at least this time he wasn't buried alive. He could hear his dogs barking from inside the house.

Inside the house?

In that moment Will realized he was lying on his porch. How he hadn't woken up the second he stepped into the cold, night, autumn air was a mystery. It was only a few degrees above freezing.

He ran inside and threw on a sweatshirt and sweatpants to attempt to warm up but it was too late. The outside air had chilled him to the bone. But that wasn't his biggest problem.

Sleepwalking. Will vaguely remembered a few incidents where this had happened to him as a child but nothing in recent years. Not even after quitting the police force.

In all likelihood this was just a one time thing and would never happen again. There was no need to worry. At least not yet. Sleepwalking isn't as common in adults as it is in children but that didn't mean it was really that rare.

It's not like there was any need to tell Jack. If he did, Jack would probably freak out and insist on a psych eval and Will wasn't exceptionally fond of the person Jack would go to first.

Nope, this was something Will would keep to himself. But what if this became a regular occurrence?

He couldn't really think of a solution and decided he would cross that bridge when and if he got there.

He tried to get back to sleep but there was no use. He was wide awake after the nightmare he just had. Instead he just lay in his bed staring at the roof and getting lost in thought.

He wondered what exactly had triggered the sleepwalking. The crime scene that day hadn't particularly scared him. Will was much more fascinated and intrigued than he was afraid.

But something must have scared him. One doesn't exactly get the kind of nightmare Will just had without being afraid of something.

He was afraid of David Campbell but he had been for years and it had never caused him to get out of bed in the night. While Campbell had featured in the dream, he wasn't the central focus. At this point Will would be surprised if he didn't show up. Campbell had been a staple character in his nightmares for years.

This dream was so scary because Will had forgotten who he was. He became the mushroom farmer. But this wasn't the first time a killer got so deep into his mind so what was the problem?

Will decided he would come back to this question at a later date. He was much too exhausted to come up with a proper answer and it would be easier if he took his mind to a happier place.

When morning finally came he made himself a cup of coffee. It was bitter and he didn't even bother to put any milk in it. He was going to need a few cups considering he only had a couple hours of sleep and even then they weren't very restful.

He slid out of bed and changed into some real clothes. The dogs probed at his ankles, clearly anxious to go out for the morning.

Will let them out and after he shut the door he went looking for his phone. He always misplaced the damn thing. Somehow it was always falling between couch cushions or left in various odd places around the kitchen. Once he had even found it in the fridge.

When he finally found his phone, which was still in his jacket pocket from the day before, Will saw several texts and a missed call from Alana Bloom. This was particularly odd considering she never contacted him outside of work.

He punched in her number and she picked up on the second ring.

“Will, I’m so glad you called. I’m assuming you haven’t seen it yet.”

“Haven’t seen what?” Will asked, feeling a pit form in his stomach. What could she be talking about? Will ran through a list of things in his head but couldn’t think of which problem she could be referring to.

“Freddie Lounds published an article on you in Tattlerime. I’m so sorry I should never have let Jack talk you into any of this,” Alana replied in a soft comforting tone.

“Who’s Freddie Lou… Oh” Will started before remembering the woman with bright red curls that had tried to get his attention at the crime scene. He had heard of Freddie Lounds and Tattlecrime before but had never had a face to put to the name. “You don’t have to worry about me Alana, this isn’t the first time I’ve had articles written about me. Whatever it is I can handle it.”

“I know. But it’s really bad Will. I don’t think you should read it.”

“Okay I won’t I promise.” This was a blatant lie. Of course Will was going to read the article but he also wanted to appease Alana. He knew it would upset her if he argued.

“Okay. I wasn’t kidding when I told you I am always here for you to talk to. And even if you don’t want to talk to me about it, please talk to someone.”

“I will.” Another lie.

“Good. How is your first case working for Jack going?” Alana was clearly trying to make conversation but Will took the bait anyway. While he didn’t typically like socialization, he really did like Alana, and she seemed to like him too. Even after his frequent attempts to push her away.

“It’s going alright. I really think we are gonna catch this guy.”

“I’m glad to hear you are adjusting well. Let me know if Jack ever tries to push you too hard, I’ll tell him off,” Alana said with a little chuckle. Will was sure she knew just how much of a hard ass Jack could be sometimes.

“It’s not Jack I’m worried about,” he mumbled. Will didn’t mean to let that bit slip out. The last thing he needed to do was come off as a gossip.

“I’m assuming you are talking about Hannibal. I know he can be a little intimidating but I think you’ll really like him if you give him a chance.”

Will doubted this. At best he would grow to tolerate Dr. Lecter.

Then Will heard a scratching sound at the door. He had forgotten he left the dogs outside. They were probably itching for breakfast at this point.

“Yeah you’re probably right. Thanks for checking in on me Alana but I gotta go. Dogs need to be fed.”

“Alright, take care Will.”

Great. Of course some tabloid journalist was writing articles about him. Will could never catch a break. Though it could always be worse, one article shouldn’t do anything substantial to ruin his reputation. As long as this didn’t become a common occurrence he would be fine.

Will opened the door letting the sea of dogs come bounding in before serving them each his special recipe of homemade dog food.

When the dogs were settled into their dishes, Will grabbed his laptop and glasses and sat on his unmade bed to read the article. He punched in Tattlecrime.com then closed his eyes and took a deep breath. When he opened them again he found that his face was plastered across the front page with a title reading “*It Takes One to Know One*.”

The picture was definitely from the mushroom crime scene but luckily wasn’t one of him smiling. He couldn’t imagine the kind of heat he would receive if that got out. It still wasn’t a particularly flattering photo considering his face looked blank, deep in concentration. It definitely fit the narrative of the article which implied he was a psychopath.

Will skimmed through most of it and noted a few lines saying things such as the FBI was using “one demented mind to catch another.”

He took off his glasses and rubbed his eyes. At least Freddie hadn’t connected that he was the same Will Graham who was stabbed by a serial killer. Well at least not yet anyway, it was bound to surface eventually. After all it would probably be of interest to Freddie and her readers. Anything for a story.

Will was interrupted from this train of thought when his phone buzzed.

Who needs me now.

It was a text from a number he didn't recognize.

Hello Will, Jack was kind enough to give me your number after you left in such a rush. If you are free tonight I would like to have you at my office to go over the case a bit more thoroughly since we did not have much of a chance yesterday. Say 7:30?

Dr. Hannibal Lecter

Will groaned. Why did everyone seem to insist on him being sociable today? He went to text back that he was busy and couldn’t make it, but he knew the doctor would see through this as an obvious lie. After all it was pretty clear to anyone with eyes that Will was never busy.

Dr. Lecter had probably picked the time knowing Will would have no excuse not to go.

He quickly typed out a reply.

7:30 will work. But I won't be able to stay for long.

Hopefully adding that last bit will allow him to escape as soon as possible without feeling guilty.

Will's phone buzzed again but this time with just an address in Baltimore. It would be an hour and a half long drive if he left straight from Quantico after his Thursday evening class and would still be another hour back to Wolftrap when he left.

He tried to convince himself he was grumpy about the drive but honestly Will loved driving. The peaceful silence in the car was the best place for him to think. If anything his 45 minute drive to and from work might be the best part of any given day.

Which reminded him he still had to teach today. He didn't actually have to be there until noon, he had no morning classes after he switched to part time to consult for Jack. He also didn't have any classes at all on Mondays and Fridays anymore which meant he would have more time to show up at crime scenes across the country over the weekends if he needed to.

Will spent the rest of his morning rereading the Tattlecrime article and then taking the dogs on a nice long walk before he headed off to teach his afternoon classes.

Today's lecture was on serial gun violence. In particular Will spoke about a killer that had tormented Missouri in the 90s by breaking into homes, gathering a family up and forcing them to choose which of them would die. This was the most interesting case Will could find on serial killing with a gun considering guns as murder weapons were exceptionally boring.

Will had always found guns to be impersonal. If you are going to kill someone, a gun is such a wasted opportunity when there are a hundred more personal ways to do it.

But it was still an important part of the curriculum.

Guns can give even the most feeble man a sense of power and this leads to a lot of perpetrators having quite a lack of creativity.

Even the killer Will had picked out as more interesting than the rest had turned out to be a 45 year old man who still lived with his mother. This man felt powerless in his life and the only way he could possibly take back that power was with a gun. Pathetic.

Speaking of guns, Will still had to get recertified to carry one on the job. His licence had expired a while back but he never bothered to get a new one considering he was just a teacher. But if he was going to be out in the field more regularly it would be smart to have one on him. He made a mental note to bring this up to Jack the next time they spoke.

When he finally finished his classes for the day, Will gathered his things and began the long drive to Baltimore.

He considered texting Dr. Lecter and canceling but decided not to. He had already promised he was leaving early so it's not like he had to stay for long. He would go in talk about the

case and then get out before he let any personal details slip. Will could just tell him that the dogs would need to eat and be let out, and that wasn't even a lie.

When Will pulled up to the office in Baltimore he had to double check the address. The street seemed entirely too fancy for a psychiatrists office. However he confirmed it, this was in fact the right address.

He walked up the steps and opened the door of the building to find himself in a waiting room.

The room was eerily tidy and completely spotless. It was apparent a lot of thought went into the choice of furniture and decoration as everything seemed to have a very particular aesthetic.

Everything in the room looked expensive. Not in a flashy or in your face sort of way. It was tasteful.

For a brief moment Will was worried he might be a little underdressed to be in a place like this. The thought passed when he realized that it's not like he came here to impress anyone.

Behind an antique looking leather couch was a portrait of "The Raft of the Medusa" which was a peculiar choice for a psychiatrist's office. After all the painting depicts the aftermath of the wreckage of a naval ship where 147 men were stranded on a poorly constructed raft. Only 15 of the men survived the nearly two weeks it took for rescue, and those 15 men were starved and dehydrated and had to resort to cannibalism to survive.

This wasn't exactly the welcoming atmosphere one would usually expect a waiting room to look like. Especially one that was meant for people with psychological problems.

"You are right on time, come in."

Will turned around to see Dr. Lecter standing in the entrance to his office. He must have gotten too distracted by the painting to hear the door open behind him. He felt his ears go red and awkwardly smiled at the floor.

The doctor that stood before him seemed like a completely different beast to the one he had met the day before. He wore a brown checkered three piece suit with a pale blue undershirt and a dark paisley tie. On anyone else the getup might look ridiculous but Dr. Lecter had managed to pull it off.

"Interesting choice in art for a waiting room," Will blurted out. He didn't actually want to say anything about it but the words slipped out before he could stop himself

"The Raft of the Medusa is an icon of french romanticism" Dr. Lecter replied with an amused smile. He probably wasn't used to anyone being so bold as to actually point out his ridiculously dark taste in art.

Will walked into the large office and his coat was taken from him and hung up neatly before he could get out a word of protest.

The first word to come to mind when he stepped through the doorway was menacing. This place was practically designed to be intimidating to anyone who entered.

“Would you like anything to drink?” Dr. Lecter asked, watching as Will wandered around the office doing a quick intake of everything he saw.

This room was clearly meant to be theatrical. Walking through the threshold was almost like walking into another world. Everything about this place was tailored to perfection, including Dr. Lecter himself. All the furniture and art pieces were put together to carefully distract whoever walked in here from the man in question. It was obvious there was something about the doctor that he didn’t want people to see.

“Have any whiskey?” Will shot back before sitting down in one of the large black chairs in the center of the room.

He looked up at the vast collection of books that sat on the second floor and wondered to himself if Dr. Lecter had actually read them all or if they were really just for show. He decided on the former as he couldn’t imagine his host would need to fake intelligence, it was clear from meeting him that he was exceptionally smart.

Dr. Lecter glided over, handing over a glass of whiskey in an ornate glass, ever so slightly brushing his fingers against Will’s as he handed it to him.

“I would apologize for the psychoanalysis yesterday, but I know I will soon be apologizing again and you will tire of that eventually, so I will have to consider using apologies sparingly.” Dr. Lecter sat in the chair opposite Wills, swirling a wine glass in his hand. Of course he would be drinking wine, no matter what his guest was having.

Will fought the urge to roll his eyes at the comment. It was a fine way to appear polite without actually apologizing for anything.

“Just keep it professional,” He replied, his eyes fixed on his glass.

“Or we could socialize like adults.”

“We aren’t here to socialize. We are here to go over the case.” This came out with a little more bite than Will had intended it to. He was miserably attempting to hide his growing frustration at the doctors little game.

“Of course. What I’m curious about is how the killer managed to keep his victims sedated and under the ground without any restraints. The preliminary toxicology reports didn’t come back with anything substantial, so it couldn’t have been drugs keeping them down.”

This didn’t feel genuine. Dr. Lecter was a medical doctor, he had probably come to his own conclusion about how the killer sedated his victims. He was probably testing Will, to see if he knew what he was talking about. Or he was just playing another game.

Will had just assumed whatever was in the IV was mixed with some kind of chemical restraint.

“If it isn’t drugs it has to be a health condition of some kind. Maybe a diabetic coma?”

“If that’s true the killer would have to know the medical history of the victims. He is probably a healthcare professional.”

Dr. Lecter leaned back in his chair holding his wine up to his face before taking a sniff and then a small sip. He seemed to be the kind of man that enjoyed life immensely, and savoured every moment of it. From his fashion sense to the decor of his office, the doctor appeared to take pride in everything he did and this included his choice in beverage.

Will realized that he was staring and promptly looked over at the large desk a few feet away from him.

The desk was not quite as neat as the rest of the room but was still much tidier than the one Will kept both at the FBI academy and his own home. It seemed as though Dr. Lecter kept it this way on purpose. Maybe to make him seem a little more human.

“I assume that the diabetic coma would have to have been induced somehow. Maybe a doctor or pharmacist meddled with their prescriptions.” Will replied before returning his gaze to the wine glass in Dr. Lecters hand.

“Or the victims could have known him personally, but I find this hard to believe after our previous conversation on the social isolation of the killer.”

“If he had that kind of personal relationship with all of these people he wouldn’t be searching for connection. He wouldn’t need to kill anyone.” Will was certain of this. This killer was unbearably lonely, he could feel it.

“That brings me to my next question, why mushrooms? He could have chosen anything to grow from those bodies, but every single one was covered in fungi. That was no accident.”

This time Dr. Lecters question seemed sincere. He was genuinely curious about what the killer was thinking when he chose mushrooms, and he trusted Will’s opinion about it.

“Fungi is the closest kingdom to animalia. This means that as humans we are more closely related to mushrooms than we are to plants or even bacteria” Will explained.

“He feels a certain bond with them,” Dr. Lecter agreed.

“The mushrooms are how he feels he can connect to his victims. Mycelium is sentient, it knows you are there. When you walk through landscapes it leaps up in the aftermath of your footsteps trying to grab debris.”

“When he reaches out to the people he buries, the mycelium allows them to reach back” Dr. Lecter commented. Will nodded in agreement.

He understood the killer enough to know it was more than just the mushrooms and more than just the people. It was the unity between the two that really excited him.

“It’s his design,” he said simply. And it was. This killer had to use mushrooms. He was compelled to.

“I find it interesting you used the word design to describe it. It implies that the killer had some sort of artistic vision when he did this.” Dr. Lecter leaned forward as he said this, steepling his fingers under his chin.

“I don’t think he was intending to create art when he did this. But it is still art all the same.” Will stated, looking at Dr. Lecter to gauge his reaction before continuing. But the doctor didn’t react. “What is art if not the expression of human imagination in a form that creates a deep emotional reaction?”

Will found himself shifting his weight forwards mirroring the doctor who was gazing at him intently.

“The scene certainly does illicit a reaction. I assume our killer had a deep emotional connection to the piece as well. Under this definition, couldn’t nearly every crime scene be understood as a work of art?”

“Yes. In a way they all are. Some are more refined and elegant than others, but all killers are artists in their own right.” Will caught Dr. Lecters eyes as he said this, and he swore he could see a glimmer behind them.

“Most people would be horrified to hear you compare a serial killer to an artist.”

Will noted the use of the word “most.” Yes most people would be horrified by this comparison but the man sitting across from him appeared absolutely captivated.

“Most. But not you,” Will stated. This made the doctor smile and Will found himself doing the same.

“Art cannot always be defined as beautiful or socially acceptable. The best type of art haunts us to our very core.”

Will sat back to think about this for a moment. He hadn’t told anyone about the significance that the word “design” held for him before. He didn’t even mean to tell Dr. Lecter, but it just slipped out.

Then he realized, despite his best efforts, he had been led astray from talking about the case. Once again the conversation had been hijacked without him even noticing.

Will had to admit Dr. Lecter was good at what he did.

He did his best to try and regain control of the conversation.

“Whoever left 9 bodies in shallow graves covered in mushrooms did not intend for them to be seen. This work of art was for the killers eyes only.”

“Well then we should be grateful we were given the opportunity to see it. Would you like another drink?”

Will had nearly forgotten that he had given himself an out for this exact situation during the short conversation they had over text earlier that day.

“No thank you. I really should be going. I have a long drive back and my dogs will be waiting for me” Will insisted, remembering the excuse he had come up with.

“Maybe another time then. Are you free this time next week?”

“I’m not your patient Dr. Lecter,” Will expressed firmly as he got up from his chair, placing his whiskey glass on the side table.

“Of course not. I was only intending on asking you back to my office for drinks. God forbid we become friendly.”

Will shuffled towards the door and the doctor handed him his jacket. Will looked him in the eye before saying:

“I don’t find you that interesting.” he expected Dr. Lecter to be angry at this, or at the very least displeased, but instead the corners of his mouth turned up.

“You will.”

And with that Will walked out the door with his jacket still in hand, prepared for the long drive home.

He wasn’t exactly telling the truth when he said Dr. Lecter wasn’t that interesting. Will actually thought the opposite but he wasn’t going to give that up just yet.

There was something about the mysterious office and haunting aesthetic that made him want to know more. Will could read most people like a book, their feelings and motivations were glaringly obvious, but Dr. Lecter was much more like a complex puzzle that would take time to solve.

Will imagined he would crack the code eventually. The doctor appeared to be much wealthier than the average psychiatrist. Maybe that's where the secret lie. Whatever it was Will was determined to figure it out.

He wasn’t sure exactly what it was about Dr. Lecter that made him open up. Especially since Will had always made a point of never opening up to anyone, sometimes not even to himself. It could be because Will knew he was a psychiatrist, but that didn’t seem right. He had known plenty of psychiatrists including Alana Bloom who he had never even considered opening up to. Yet here he was telling a tightly guarded secret after just meeting the man.

Maybe Will was still recovering from his nightmare. The mushroom gardner had been taking up a large portion of his mind lately. Will could easily have been reaching out because that is what the killer would have done.

Or maybe there was some other reason.

At that moment Will abruptly slammed the breaks. A medium size golden dog had run across the road in front of him. He gasped before pulling over slowly just in case there was another dog lurking in the bushes.

Will got out of his car carefully so as to not scare the dog. Luckily he had some old treats in his jacket pocket. They were probably stale but would do in a pinch.

The dog backed away timidly but Will was patient. He knelt down stretching his hand out for the dog to sniff it. After a few minutes it nervously approached him. The dog's apprehension seemed to dissolve when Will gave him one of the stale treats.

“What are you doing out here all alone?” Will whispered in a soft tone. He gave the dog a scratch behind the ears and fed him another treat. It gobbled up the treat without hesitation. The poor thing was pretty thin and looked like he hadn’t eaten a proper meal in days.

“You look terribly lonely. How about I take you home. There are plenty of friends there to keep you company.”

It took some effort to coax the dog into his car but he managed it after he pulled out his third and final treat.

“Trust me Winston, you won’t be going hungry on my watch.”

Winston.

The name had just popped into his head but it seemed fitting.

Will drove the rest of the way home with a smile on his face, after all he did make a new friend today, which always put him in a good mood. Especially if said friend was a dog.

Chapter End Notes

Some of the facts I used about the mycelium were directly from a mycologist (mushroom scientist) named Paul Stamets who I am very confident Eldon Stammets is based off of.
I am hoping to get the next chapter out next Saturday! Hopefully updates will come weekly specifically every Saturday, I'll let you know if that changes.

Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

> Surprise! A day early! I am so motivated to write because of you all. Whether you are silently reading or leaving comments and kudos, I appreciate every single one of you.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Hannibal had always prided himself in being a patient man, but when he sat in his office across from Franklyn Froideveaux his patience was certainly tested.

Franklyn was a short, round man who was constantly dripping with sweat. This was likely due to the fact that he was always a little too overdressed for a patient. Normally Hannibal might appreciate his efforts as he firmly believed one could not be dressed too formally for most occasions, but it was clear Franklyn was just copying him and had no proper taste of his own.

He even tested this theory once by intentionally wearing a more casual outfit (well casual for Hannibal's standards) to Franklyn’s appointment and sure enough the next week Franklyn was dressed in a very similar style.

This was representative of a more pervasive problem Franklyn appeared to have, which was that he was obsessed with Hannibal. It was very clear that he was trying to put on a show for him with his outfits and newfound knowledge of art, wine, and cuisine. Maybe under different circumstances this would be flattering but Franklyn’s efforts were nothing short of pathetic. This was saying something as Hannibal typically loved flattery, he wasn’t exactly a humble man after all, but something about Franklyn just made him uneasy.

He most definitely should have referred Mr. Froideveaux to a different psychiatrist by now, especially after his increasingly creepy efforts to have them run into each other in public. Over the last month Hannibal had seen him at the local fromagerie, an art exhibition, and an antique store. There was simply no way these were all a coincidence.

However he kept him around because he was an excellent case study on how to appear non threatening. This was especially helpful now that Hannibal was working for the FBI. He didn’t need anyone at the bureau taking any interest in him so copying some of the mannerisms of the least interesting person he knew could come in handy.

Franklyn was droning on about artisan bread but Hannibal was only half listening. He was usually an attentive listener but he couldn’t help but let his mind wander during these kinds of sessions. It was easier for him to just nod along and make small comments here and there so his patient wouldn’t think he was distracted.

His thoughts drifted back to the conversation he had the night before with Will.

I don't find you that interesting.

This comment had been undeniably rude and normally after such a development Hannibal would be tucking away a business card in his rolodex, but with Will he didn't feel the need to. Who knows, maybe he still would kill him in the future, but for now keeping Will alive was the much more entertaining alternative.

Most of the time when people met Hannibal, they were intimidated, they would go out of their way to seem more sophisticated or intelligent to impress him. Not Will. If anything Will seemed to put on a front that made him appear *less* intelligent than he really was with his flannel shirts and dog hair covered trousers. Which were absolutely appalling by the way, Hannibal had already found 3 individual dog hairs stuck to various pieces of furniture around the room and would likely find more before the day was up. He really wished Will had heard of a lint roller.

His interest in Will was truly piqued when he referred to the mushroom crime scene as *art*. Hannibal had always considered himself an artist when he left a tableaux for law enforcement to find. He put considerable effort into sculpting bodies from the ugly things they were into sculptures of divine proportions. But he never actually thought he would find someone that felt the same way about the artistic nature of killing and setting a scene as he did. He was slightly offended by the idea that his pieces could be compared to something as unsophisticated as bodies infested with fungus but was able to brush past this when he thought about how Will might describe his own murders.

In fact the thought was so appealing Hannibal decided it might nearly be time to bring the Chesapeake Ripper out of retirement just to see Will's reaction to whatever crime scene he left for him. It had been over two years now, if the Ripper was to make a reappearance he would ensure that it would be worthwhile.

A bell chimed knocking Hannibal from his train of thought.

"I'm afraid our hour is up, will I be seeing you at the same time next week?" Hannibal asked knowing that Franklyn would never miss a chance to see him.

"Of course, when have I ever missed an appointment?"

Hannibal forced a polite smile at this comment and then proceeded to show Franklyn out the door.

Thankfully, Franklyn was his last appointment of the day. Though he still had a meeting with his own psychiatrist at her home office later that afternoon.

It wasn't uncommon for therapists to have a therapist of their own, and Hannibal was not ashamed to admit he probably needed it. He spent a significant amount of time and effort concealing his true nature and it was nice to be able to let his guard down, even just a little bit, during his conversations with Dr. Du Maurier.

It was very difficult to find an acceptable psychiatrist but Dr. Bedelia Du Maurier proved to be the perfect candidate. He needed someone he could have leverage over, someone who

could peer between the stitches of his well tailored person suit and stay silent about what they saw.

To achieve this, Hannibal referred a patient to her that he had groomed to start choking when he was stressed. He had an inkling that Dr. Du Maurier would not be inclined to help him when she saw him choking and would instead harm him.

His suspicions were proven to be correct when he found the psychiatrist had taken her patients life instead of saving him. He helped her clean up the scene and gave her a cover story that she could tell the police in order to maintain her innocence.

Because of this she owed Hannibal a great debt, she would not be able to run to the authorities with any suspicions she may have about him without fear that he would tell them about the patient she had murdered in cold blood.

He was not so naïve as to trust her completely, but as long as he had leverage, he could let his walls down around her. This did not mean he would tell her about his extracurricular activities of course, but he would let her catch small glimpses of himself in order for her to be able to treat him.

His doctor patient relationship with Bedelia had also proven to be a study of a particularly riveting mind. She wasn't a killer in the way Hannibal was, instead was opportunistic. He was confident that given the opportunity she would kill again. He was certain he could toy with this prospect and maybe use it to his advantage someday.

While Dr. Du Maurier was his psychiatrist and not the other way around, Hannibal was confident his influence on her was much stronger than her influence on him. He couldn't completely give up control in any circumstance he was in, though he was certain she was starting to come to terms with this.

He walked up the steps of his psychiatrists home and proceeded to knock on the door.

He had always admired her house, after all her tastes were not dissimilar from his own. Maybe that was part of the reason he sought her out in the first place.

"Hello Hannibal, come in," she opened the door and stepped back to let him in. Her long blond curls were draped effortlessly across her shoulder, not a single hair was out of place. Bedelia it seemed, also had an expertly crafted appearance to hide the reality of her darkness behind.

Hannibal strolled inside, taking his usual seat across from Bedelia's, in front of a large window.

"This always goes better if we are perfectly honest with each other," she asserted in a cool tone after taking her place across from him.

"I'm honest," he claimed.

"Not perfectly."

“Is anyone perfectly honest? Many of us can’t even be truthful with ourselves so how can we be expected to be honest with those around us?”

“You could start by letting down the human veil you surround yourself with.”

She was right of course. But he would not let down the veil. It had protected him for years, allowing him to live freely without fear of losing his independence. He was confident that if he never let anyone in, he would never be caught. Instead he would avoid the topic entirely.

“I met a man recently. A colleague in my consulting work for the FBI. Someone I would typically never associate with, yet I am intrigued by him.”

“What exactly is it about this man that is of interest to you?” Bedelia questioned, allowing him to take the conversation away from his dishonesty.

“He has a gift. A rare empathy disorder that allows him to see things from a killer's point of view.”

“So it's a professional curiosity then?”

“Yes. And a personal one. Will Graham can see more than just a killer's point of view. He can see anyone's. Even mine.”

“It’s nice when people can see us through the walls we put up.”

It was true. Hannibal should be afraid of someone who has the capacity to see him for who he is. He should be running in the opposite direction to protect himself from the scrutiny of the FBI. But instead he found himself longing to be seen. He had spent so long putting on a show for the world and a part of him wanted someone to know him. He wasn’t certain this person would be Will Graham but he could see the potential in him.

“I see the possibility for friendship in Will. Which is more than I can say for most people.”

“I have not known you to be someone who has a substantial amount of friends” Bedelia said smoothly, reaching down to adjust her pencil skirt over her knee.

“I have a great deal of acquaintances. People who will attend my dinner parties or speak with me at social events, though I would not consider most of these people to be my friends,” Hannibal admitted. It was true, he didn’t consider the socialites he met at the opera or art galleries to be his friends. They were merely tools he used to keep his cover, he didn’t share anything with them.

“Then considering the possibility of friendship with Will Graham is a big deal for you.”

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Will woke up peacefully to his alarm. Maybe for others this would be normal but for Will it was odd. He had actually slept through the entire night. No nightmares, no sleepwalking, and no waking up randomly in the middle of the night to pee or grab a snack.

Even at the best of times Will had a tough time sleeping through the night. He was typically a light sleeper so it was common for a noise outside or the shifting of one of his dogs to wake him.

He slid out of bed and went through his usual morning routine of feeding the dogs, taking a little extra time for Winston.

Winston actually seemed to be getting along great with the rest of the dogs. Not that Will expected any different, his dogs had always been welcoming and very well behaved. He was a little worried Winston would have a tough time adjusting, but he seemed to have slept through his first night and eaten all of his food without a single problem.

After feeding and letting the dogs outside, Will took a shower and made himself breakfast. He often would forget to cook for himself but the lack of nightmares the night before put him in a good enough mood to remember to take care of himself.

It was a Friday which meant he didn't have to teach but he had promised Jack he would give him his profile of the mushroom farmer today so he would still have to drive to Quantico. The only problem was, he hadn't actually started the profile yet.

He figured he could just write it when he got there. Will already had all the information he needed to write a good profile and anything he missed he had figured out in his discussion with Dr. Lecter.

When he got to the FBI headquarters he spent over an hour writing up 8 pages on the killer. He was actually pretty proud of it. Will was confident between the forensic evidence and his profile, they would catch this killer.

When he was satisfied with the report he strolled over to Jack's office and knocked on the door. He had secretly hoped Jack wouldn't be in so he could just slip the papers into his mailbox and be on his way home but of course Will could never be so lucky.

The door swung open and Jack gave him a smile.

"Hello Will. I was worried you forgot about the report. Please come right in."

Will walked into the office after handing Jack the profile and sat in the same seat as he had the day he visited the crime scene.

"I hope this covered everything. If you need anything else feel free to ask and I'll answer the best I can" Will said while looking at the cup of pencils and pens on the desk.

"Thank you, I will," Jack replied without looking up from the pages he was holding.

Will sat there in silence for what felt like forever as Jack read through his report. He wished he could just go home. He didn't understand why Jack had to keep him there while he read the whole thing. It was probably some kind of power move.

Or more likely, Jack was used to people doing things on his time. He didn't think about how this might inconvenience anyone else because it didn't bother him.

“This is really good Will,” Jack commented after finally finishing his reading.

“Thanks. I really want to emphasize that this is most likely a medical professional of some kind, most likely a doctor or a pharmacist.”

“I’ll get the team on it right away. We are going to catch this son of a bitch.”

“Yeah I really think so,” Will replied. It was nice to hear that Jack also shared his confidence.

“You know you and Dr. Lecter make a really good team. I’m glad I brought you both in on this case.”

Jack was right. A lot of the stuff Will put in his profile of the killer never would have come up if he hadn’t discussed it with Dr. Lecter. At the very least the doctor was good to bounce ideas off of and was able to give Will a little more insight into the killer than he had before.

It wasn’t very often that Will found himself working better with another person than he had alone. But Dr. Lecter had a way of asking all the right questions that would lead him to conclusions about the mushroom farmer he probably wouldn't have come to on his own.

This likely meant Will would be working with the psychiatrist for the foreseeable future. Despite his irritation with the man, Will didn’t actually find this prospect as frustrating as he thought he would.

“Thanks Jack. Call me if you get any more updates on the case.”

“Of course,” Jack nodded. Will started to stand up but Jack interrupted him. “I saw the article on Tattlecrime. Freddie Lounds writes crap like that all the time. You aren’t the first agent of mine she has targeted. Try not to let it get to you.”

Will knew this was coming. Of course Jack knew about the article and he certainly wasn’t going to let him go without bringing it up. Jack probably wanted to see his reaction so Will kept his face flat and his voice neutral as possible.

“Don’t worry Jack. I’ll be fine. It’s not the first time tabloid journalists have gotten ahold of me. She’ll get bored eventually. I’m not half as interesting as she makes me out to be.”

Jack laughed a little at that. The realization had likely dawned on him that this wasn’t even the worst article ever written about Will.

“Take care. I’ll call you the second I hear more.”

With that Will stood up and bolted out of the office before Jack could ask him for anything else. But when he opened the door he practically ran face first into Alana Bloom.

“I’m so sorry,” Will stuttered, feeling his cheeks go red. Alana took a step back to give them both a little more personal space.

“We really have to stop meeting like this,” Alana giggled. She really had an adorable laugh. It was practically contagious and Will felt himself chuckle as well. “So what has you running

out of Jack's office like your life depends on it?"

"I had to hand in a profile for the case I'm working on, and Jack brought up the Tattlecrime article."

"No wonder you wanted to get out of there so quickly," Alana replied warmly. She knew he didn't want to talk about the article and he was grateful that she didn't push the topic.

"Yeah Jack can be pretty intimidating."

"I don't doubt that. Jack tells me he thinks you guys are getting close to solving this one. You really impressed him with your talents."

"Yeah I think we are, but I can't take all the credit, Dr. Lecter helped a lot" Will stated, looking at the collar of Alana's blouse. She always looked so professional and put together. He could not say the same for himself.

"I'm glad to hear you and Hannibal are working well together. I knew you would come around. He was my mentor at Johns Hopkins and I remember he always seemed to ask the right questions."

"Yeah he definitely knows what he's talking about" Will nodded.

"How are your dogs?" Alana asked. Will always hated this kind of small talk but was willing to endure it for Alana.

"Actually I just picked up a new dog last night. He still needs to go for a check up at the vet but I think he's going to fit right in with everyone."

"Another one? How many are there now?"

"Seven," Will muttered sheepishly. He knew it wasn't the most attractive thing to own seven dogs. In fact most women probably saw it as a huge red flag. "I have a bad habit of collecting strays," he added.

"Honestly I think it's admirable and really sweet of you to show interest in creatures the rest of the world turned away. You should let me meet them some time."

Will felt himself blush once again. He and Alana had never really been in a room alone together before, not that they were now. They were in a hallway and it was fairly busy. Yet suddenly she was wanting to come over to his place. Will wasn't always great with social cues but he was certain she was flirting with him.

"Yeah totally. You're welcome anytime" he paused before adding "I should really head home and make sure Winston is adjusting well without me."

"Alright, I'm looking forward to it. See you around Will" Alana smiled at him once more before slipping into Jack's office.

He should've invited her over today but he really did want to check in on Winston and to be honest dating wasn't his biggest priority right now. If Alana really was interested, he could ask her out properly in a few weeks once he had his life a little more sorted out.

Will hopped in his car and started the long drive home.

He had a sinking feeling the entire way home. One that seemed to come about for no reason. It was like the feeling of walking into a lion's den.

Will found himself checking over his shoulder several times to make sure there was no one hiding in the back seat. He was probably just being paranoid.

When he got home his gut twisted even further. Something didn't feel right. He couldn't explain it but the air just felt wrong. He decided it would be best to go into town to get his mind off of it.

Will backed out of his driveway and went down to the pet store to shake off the uneasy feeling. He figured it would be nice to grab a few extra toys for the dogs to reward them for being so good to Winston.

Pet toys were way too expensive for what they were worth. His dogs managed to destroy even the toughest most durable chew toys he could buy in just a few days.

Despite this Will still found himself frequently caving and buying the toys anyway. He liked to treat his dogs. They really did deserve it after he had been away from them so much lately.

When he got back home he had completely forgotten about the uneasy feeling he had gotten before.

His phone started to buzz and he pulled it out of his pocket while still sitting in his car.

"Graham," he answered.

"Will, great news. We have got a suspect. It looks like you were right, we got a hit on a pharmacist who handled prescriptions for every one of our victims. His name is Eldon Stammets. I'm headed over to his house right now to take him in for questioning. I'll call you later with more info. Keep your phone on you. I might want you to interview him."

That was fast.

Will wished he was there with Jack for the arrest, he would have liked to see the suspects home. It would have given him a very clear picture on whether or not they had the right guy. He could tell a lot about a person by the way they kept their home.

But Jack probably wouldn't have let him go anyway considering he still wasn't allowed to have a gun.

Which reminded him that he forgot to ask Jack about getting himself recertified.

Will stepped out of his car and grabbed the bag from the pet store then started walking towards his house. His stomach dropped as he heard a voice behind him.

“Will Graham?” a male voice murmured.

Will dropped the bag of dog toys and turned around slowly with his hands raised to see an older man pointing a gun at him. The man was wearing a casual shirt and jeans under a well worn fall jacket. He clearly wasn’t used to carrying a gun, it was a little wobbly in his hand.

“I assume you’re the gardener we are looking for. Why are you here?” Will questioned, trying not to come off as too angry so he wouldn’t end up getting shot.

If only Will had handed in the profile sooner, the killer would have been arrested and he would not be in this situation. He really should’ve called Jack on his drive home from Baltimore the night before and told him what he knew.

“I-I read the article on Tattlecrime. It said you’re like me. That you understand me. I had to know. I followed you from the FBI headquarters” the man stuttered.

Will nodded. He had to be calm if he wanted to get out of this alive. He really wished he had his handgun on him. There was a rifle in the house but that wouldn’t do him any good right now. He was going to have to use his brain to get out of this one.

“I do understand you Eldon. I know that you are lonely. That’s why you have to do it. You reach out to them and for the first time, they are able to reach back. I’m like you. I don’t have anyone either.” He slowly lowered his hands back down to his sides.

Will knew that Eldon Stammets would believe him. He was desperate. But somehow everything he said was true. He *did* understand him and he *was* alone. The difference between them is Will wanted to be alone. Or at least he thought he did.

“I needed to bury them. I loved them. But now they’re gone. I’ve lost them and I don’t know what I’m going to do.” Eldon sounded panicked, tears threatening to stream from his eyes at any second. After all he had lost what he had considered to be his closest friends. Will almost felt bad for him.

“It’s okay, you can start a new garden” he offered, taking a step forward.

Stammets nodded lowering his gun to the ground.

“Will you… Will you help me?” he asked, eyes darting up to meet Will’s. But Will looked away, he couldn’t stomach seeing the full range of emotion in the man's eyes.

Will took another step forward and reached out to put a reassuring hand on the man's shoulder. Even without eye contact he could feel the pain that Stammets was feeling. He was almost drowning in it. In that moment he fully understood him.

When he touched him, Will realized that the man in front of him had let his guard down and he seized the opportunity. He lunged towards Eldon Stammets to grab the gun from his loose

grip. This sent both men tumbling to the ground, each of them trying to wrestle the weapon out of each other's hands.

This moment gave him a flashback to the way David Campbell had pinned him down and stabbed him. Except this time it was Will that had the upper hand.

A shot rang out echoing across the empty field and sending the dogs into a barking frenzy.

Will gasped before realizing it was not him that had been shot. Eldon let go of the gun and was clutching his arm in agony. His face was twisted with both pain and confusion at Will's seemingly sudden change of heart.

Will put the gun to Eldon's forehead, pressing the cold gun to his bare skin. He put his finger on the trigger and was aching to pull it. He could kill him right now and everyone would believe it was in self defense. Nobody would even question it.

Will felt Eldon's fear hit him like a wave. Every bit of it was absolutely delicious. He was in control. He had the power, right here right now to end a man's life. It was intoxicating.

You can't escape who you are Will. No matter how much you run the darkness will always be there. I will always be there.

David Campbell's words echoed in Wills mind.

What was he doing? Will stood up, gun still trained on Eldon Stammets but this time with no intent to pull the trigger unless he had to. He stumbled backwards, clutching his chest, feeling his heart start to race. He found himself gasping for air.

The calm he had felt when he had thought he was going to kill Eldon was gone and now he was falling into a full blown panic attack.

Everything started to go fuzzy as if Will was just observing his body from the outside rather than actually inhabiting it.

He reached into his pocket and pulled out his cellphone and called 911 for an ambulance and the police.

Will stood in silence, staring at Stammets in disbelief for the entirety of the 9 minutes it took the emergency services to show up.

The police whisked Eldon Stammets away in an ambulance and sent two officers with him.

Will felt numb. The air around him was still as if time itself had frozen. The dogs had gone silent again and the house in front of him didn't feel like his own anymore. It felt like a crime scene. A place he would visit briefly as a cop.

His yard looked the same as if nothing had even happened there. The only way to tell that Stammets had been there at all was the fact there were still cops on his property and more were probably on the way.

Two officers stayed to question Will. He told them the story several times, leaving out the bit where he got high on a murder fantasy of course.

The words coming out of his mouth didn't feel like his own. They felt rehearsed, as if he had practiced the speech a hundred times instead of coming up with it on the spot.

Will didn't have any problem lying to the police, he had done it before. His problem wasn't lying, it was the fact that he had almost killed someone in cold blood. This wasn't acceptable even if that man was a killer.

After what felt like an eternity of questioning, Jack pulled up to the house wearing a long overcoat and his signature fedora.

Will pressed his lips together in a sort of "almost smile" and stood up from his position leaning against the cop car.

"We caught the son of a bitch" Will stated, going for lighthearted but the sound that came out was much more pained than he intended it to be.

"More accurately you caught him Will," Jack responded solemnly.

Will then recounted the entire story to Jack for what must have been the tenth time in the past hour. When he finished, Jack just nodded.

"By the way I'm going to need to get recertified to carry a gun on duty."

"You sure you still want to work for me after everything that just happened?"

"It's not the first time I've been attacked by a serial killer Jack. I'll be fine." Will shrugged. His eyes were focused on his shoes.

The sun was starting to set and it was much too cold to be standing outside. Will wished everyone would just go away so he could be alone with his dogs.

"Last time a serial killer attacked you, you quit your job and moved halfway across the country. Forgive me if I'm a little worried about your mental state."

"I'll be fine. Didn't get stabbed this time."

"Well I'm still going to insist you take some time off and think about it. You really were a hero today Will."

Jack was probably right to be worried but Will didn't feel the urge to abandon his life anymore. He was stronger than he was after Louisiana. It had changed him. And he certainly wasn't going to comment on the part about being a hero.

The police wrapped up their work and left. Jack stayed behind to talk to Will for a bit longer but soon he was gone too.

Will finally walked through the threshold of his house to greet the dogs and it felt like an entirely different house. The dogs wagged their tails happy to see him. He knelt down and gave them each a little kiss on the top of their heads before letting them outside.

Will followed behind the dogs after grabbing a slightly warmer jacket. It was getting dark and he would need it.

He walked out to the tree line and looked at the house sitting in the distance. It reminded him of a boat on the water, serenely bobbing in the waves. This image always seemed to calm him down. It was peaceful and quiet, the only sounds were his dogs chasing each other around in the distance.

Moments like these were the only times he ever truly felt safe.

Will finally let himself think about what had transpired earlier. He had almost killed someone and enjoyed it. This time he couldn’t blame his darkness on being a dream. This time it was real. He had gotten caught up in it. Lost in the ecstasy of the idea of killing someone. He couldn’t blame it on losing himself to the mind of another killer either. This was all Will.

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter will come around the same time next week. School is getting busy as exams are fast approaching so I am writing a little bit ahead so that there aren't any weeks without an update. I don't have an exact estimate as to how long this fic is going to be yet but I'll let you know right now I intend to see it through right to the very end.

Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Icy cold air seemed to seep through Will's skin, chilling him to his core. The sunrise gave the sky a pinkish hue. The dark outline of the trees in the distance were in stark contrast to the bright colours of the sky behind them. It was peaceful, so much so that Will was able to ignore the icy wind against his bare thighs.

Wait

He realized he was standing on his roof in just his t-shirt and underwear. He wasn't sure how long he had been awake or even how long he had been standing out here in some kind of trance.

Sleepwalking he thought to himself. Maybe he was a bit overly hopeful when he thought the sleepwalking would be a one time thing. Clearly it was escalating. This was dangerous. Will was lucky he hadn't fallen off the roof and died. Or maybe *unlucky*.

Briefly he wondered what it would be like if he just died right then. But as soon as the thought crossed his mind he pushed it away.

He clambered back in through the open window he had likely gone through on his way out. His dogs were whining as if to ask him what the hell he was doing. He didn't have an answer for them.

It had been four days since his altercation with Eldon Stammets and he had spent those four days moping around the house with a bottle of scotch.

It was a Tuesday so he would normally have class but Jack refused to let him go. He insisted that Will take a few days to really think about everything that happened and to do that he would need to clear his schedule of distractions.

Will just wanted his life to go back to normal. He didn't need all of these people fretting over him like he was a piece of fine china that would shatter under the smallest amount of stress. He was a grown man for God's sake and he didn't need all the extra attention.

It felt like everyone he knew was calling in to check on him. Jack called to talk every day and so did Alana. Beverly had shot him a few texts to which he had given vague one word answers hoping she would get off his case.

He understood the concern but that didn't mean he appreciated it. Hopefully this would all blow over and everyone would stop bringing it up. He really didn't want to think about it anymore.

He decided to spend the day at the gun range. If he wanted to carry a gun he was going to have to pass an accuracy test. Will had never been a great shot and he was probably pretty rusty so he would need some practice before he went to get recertified.

There was also the pesky task of getting a psych eval. Even if Will wasn't going to be carrying a gun around, Jack still wanted him to have one done before he went back in the field. There wasn't going to be any getting out of this, when Jack had his mind on something, nothing would stand in his way.

Begrudgingly Will texted Dr. Lecter and asked if the 7:30pm appointment on Thursday was still available. Of course the doctor replied almost immediately saying it was.

Hopefully this wouldn't give him any wrong ideas. Will still wasn't his patient after all. He would have chosen a different psychiatrist to do the evaluation except for the fact the only other one he knew was Alana and he certainly wasn't going to go to her. His only other option would be to meet someone entirely new and this didn't feel like a viable option either. The less people Will had to be sociable with the better.

The gun range was fairly empty, just a few trainees who were practicing their firearms skills. One of them even stopped to congratulate him on his work catching Eldon Stammets. Will tried to smile and say thank you but what happened was more of a grimace and a gruff unfeeling "thanks."

He was almost certain she would run off and tell all her friends about how "Will Graham is a total creep."

Will got into his lane and fired a few shots. None of them hit where he intended them to. He was right in his assessment that he needed practice.

He had been shooting for about an hour when the target seemed to turn into Eldon Stammets. He was running at Will with his gun raised. Will shot the figure three, four, five times but he didn't drop.

Will clenched his eyes shut, waiting for the inevitable but it never came. As if nothing had even happened, Eldon Stammets had turned back into the target. He blinked a few times remembering Stammets was in police custody and couldn't possibly reach him.

Will put the gun down and jerked off his noise cancelling headset and took a few steps back. When he turned around he saw Beverly Katz leaning against the wall behind him with a half smirk on her face.

"Imagine my surprise when I come to practice shooting and I see the man of the hour, Will Graham himself, at the firing range."

"Gotta get recertified to carry a gun," Will shrugged, trying to play it cool. He had no idea how long Beverly had been there or if she saw his hallucinatory episode just a few moments earlier.

"I'm pretty sure fire arm accuracy isn't a prerequisite for teaching."

“I’ve been in the field before.”

“Well now you’re back in the saddle… ish,” Beverly said this with a teasing tone and a smile.

“Yeah ish. Clearly I can’t put a bullet to a target for the life of me. Literally. I need the practice,” Will laughed as he said this and Beverly chuckled along with him. One thing Will always appreciated about her is she always treated him with kindness. She didn’t berate him with questions or look at him funny when he did something awkward. Beverly was one of the only people he would genuinely consider to be a friend. Well sort of, they never talked outside of work but it was enough.

Will flipped his noise cancelling headset back onto his head and watched as Beverly did the same thing before he started shooting.

He fired once hitting one of the outer rims of the target before shifting his stance. It was kind of embarrassing to fail so miserably in front of someone who was as good of a shot as Beverly but he tried to push it out of his head. She wouldn’t call him on it.

“You’re a weaver. I took you for an isosceles guy.”

“Yeah, I have a rotator cuff issue so I have to use the Weaver stance.”

Will flinched when he felt Beverly lay a hand on his bad shoulder. He hated when people touched him.

“You are tight,” she stated.

“I got stabbed when I was a cop,” Will said with a hint of annoyance in his voice. He had figured that Beverly already knew about that. He never actually told her, so it was plausible she really didn’t know what happened to him.

“Yeah, I got stabbed in the third grade with a number two pencil. Thought I was gonna get lead poisoning.” This confirmed that Beverly really hadn’t heard about how got stabbed. If she had she would not be comparing her experience with a snotty eight year old to his with a serial killer.

“Uh, no lead in pencils, it’s graphite,” as Will said this Beverly moved his shoulders. He hesitantly allowed her to.

“See if that helps with the recoil.” Beverly took a step back giving Will a nod to keep shooting.

He fired four more bullets. None of them hit the center of the target but they were closer than several previous shots.

“That’s a bit better,” Will remarked as he took off the headset. He was done shooting for the day.

“Great job Graham, you’re gonna get certified in no time.” Beverly smiled and walked to her own lane.

Will grabbed his things to head out and watched as Beverly fired four shots almost hitting the center of the target with every single shot. He definitely had a lot of work to do.

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Freddie grabbed her camera out of its bag and hung it around her neck. She was waiting behind her car for Will Graham to come out of the shooting range so she could snap a few photos for Tattlecrime.

She had gotten a tip that he was here today and she really hoped she hadn't missed him. Freddie needed some new pictures of Will for her upcoming article.

It didn't surprise her one bit that Will Graham had already shot someone on his first case working for the FBI. All it did was confirm to her that her previous article about him had been correct.

She didn't have to actually speak to Will to know that he was bad news. The moment she saw him walking off the mushroom crime scene she knew there was something off about him.

Freddie had spoken to enough killers and bad guys to know one when she saw one, and everything about Will Graham set off alarm bells in her head.

He moved around like some kind of monitor lizard, flicking his eyes and creeping around, trying to blend in with his surroundings. He wore plain clothes as camouflage so people wouldn't notice him. But Freddie noticed. She saw through his socially awkward facade. She was confident he was a cunning and manipulative psychopath, and probably a killer too.

She smirked and stepped out from behind her vehicle when she saw him walk out from the building. Freddie took a few pictures, hoping at least one of them would be suitable for the front page.

At this point Will noticed her and started to slink over. She wasn't afraid of him. He wouldn't do anything to her, especially not in broad daylight. But a confrontation would make a great story.

"Hello, you must be Will Graham," she said sweetly, offering him a gloved hand to shake. He didn't take it, instead he looked just past her, refusing to make eye contact.

"Freddie Lounds," he acted as if her name tasted foul in his mouth. "Don't you have something better to do than stand outside a shooting range all day?"

"You're front page news. I go where the story takes me. And today the story has taken me to a man who hunts insane men because he himself is insane. Or at least that's what my article will say."

"I hear an "unless" in that statement," Will stated, catching on to what she was implying.

"Unless of course you are willing to do an interview about the mushroom killer," Freddie purred.

“Not interested.”

“I could undo everything I said in my previous article,” she paused for effect before continuing, “I could also make it a lot worse.”

Will bristled a bit at this. He recovered quickly, taking a step towards her and looking her dead in the eye over the top of his glasses.

“It’s not very smart to piss off a guy who thinks about killing people for a living.”

Freddie gave him a smirk. She would’ve liked an interview, but this little revelation would fit perfectly into her narrative.

***

Hannibal was delighted when he saw the text from Will Graham saying he wanted to meet. He knew Will had to pick someone to do his psychiatric evaluation but he was glad that he chose him. Especially after he had explicitly stated he didn’t find Hannibal that interesting the week prior.

Hannibal had intentionally not called or texted Will after he heard about what happened with Eldon Stammets. He knew that he would need some space and not another concerned party bothering him with well wishes. Will was not someone who needed constant reassurance and Hannibal had a feeling that if he reached out, he might push him further away. He only hoped that this would pay off, and seemingly it had.

He knew it might be difficult for Will to actually open up to him about what had happened, but Hannibal was confident he could pull it off. Will had been willing to share his thoughts about the artistic nature of killing previously and would likely admit even more if pushed.

That was part of what made Will such a stimulating subject of study. He was so pliable. Will was influenced dramatically by those around him. He took attributes from every person he interacted with, from FBI agents he worked with, to the very killers he was hunting down. This, Hannibal thought, was why Will spent most of his time avoiding socializing with people at any cost. He would be overwhelmed if he interacted with a lot of people. There would be too many personalities to sort through and separate.

But underneath all the persona’s Will took on, there was something so distinctly dark. Something that wasn’t created by his empathy disorder or any of the voices in his head. That dark nature was distinctly Will. Hannibal wasn’t even certain Will was aware of his capacity for cruelty as he suppressed it so much.

In fact Hannibal thought it was very likely that Will took on the traits of others as a defense mechanism to shield himself from his true nature. He wasn’t prepared to accept himself for what he truly was, so he shielded himself from it.

However these were all just theories, though Hannibal was interested in testing them out. He very much hoped he was right about Will. If he was, it would be very interesting to see how far he could really push him, to see how dark he really was.

Hannibal spent the entirety of his sessions on Thursday watching the clock just waiting for them to be over. He knew better than to keep checking the time, as that would only make time feel slower but he couldn't help himself. It didn't help that this day ended up being filled with some of his least interesting clients.

First there was a woman who was on her eighth marriage, she had seemed interesting at first as Hannibal thought she may have killed her previous husbands, but in reality she was just insufferably mundane.

Next was a man who Hannibal thought may have murdered his parents for their inheritance money as both of them had died only weeks apart under similar circumstances. After learning more about the situation Hannibal realized that it was almost certainly his client's younger sister who killed their parents, making his client an utter waste of time.

The rest of the patients weren't particularly notable. There was a younger man with OCD, a middle aged woman with severe depression, and finally Franklyn Froideveux.

Of course, Franklyn's session seemed to go by the slowest. It always did. At one point he even started sobbing and when Hannibal passed him a box of tissues, Franklyn crumpled one up and left it sitting on the side table.

Even without all his past grievances with him, this was enough to get Franklyn a prime spot in Hannibal's rolodex. It was unlikely that he actually would be able to kill Franklyn as it would be so easy to trace back to him, but Hannibal had hope that someday in the distant future it would be possible. If there were ever a person Hannibal could describe as a pig, it would be Franklyn.

When the session finally ended, Hannibal escorted Franklyn to the door. He spent the rest of his time before Will got there answering messages on his answering machine and organizing paperwork. He wished he had just hired a new receptionist.

He kept his eye on his watch and when 7:30 arrived he opened his office door to see Will once again admiring the artwork in the lobby. To Hannibal's surprise, Will was dressed nicer than the last time they met, though not by a large margin. He was wearing a sweater over a collared shirt and slacks instead of jeans. But of course the dog hair was still ever present. Hannibal also noted that the man in front of him wasn't wearing his glasses.

"Hello Will, come in."

He stepped aside to let Will through the door but stood close enough to catch his scent as he walked by. He smelled of cheap aftershave and dog, with a hint of gunpowder. Will had been at the firing range.

Again.

Hannibal had read a Freddie Lounds article earlier that day detailing Will's experience with Eldon Stammets that had photos of him outside a firing range and a lovely little provocative quote. The source cited for the retelling of the capture of Stammets was said to be an

anonymous FBI agent so it was likely credible, well it would be if Will told the FBI the truth but Hannibal had a feeling he did not.

“Good evening Dr. Lecter.”

Will wandered through the room, stopping to admire a sculpture of a stag sitting on a small side table.

Hannibal carefully plucked a piece of paper out of a folder sitting on his desk and walked over to the center of the room, patiently waiting for Will to notice. He wouldn’t rush him. Hannibal liked to see Will’s fascination with the art pieces he collected.

“What’s that?” Will asked when he saw the paper in Hannibal's hand.

“Your psychological evaluation. You are totally functional and more or less sane. Well done,” Hannibal answered with a smile. Will gave him a puzzled look.

“Did you just rubber stamp me?”

“Yes. Now Jack can rest easily at night knowing that he did not break you and our conversation can go on unobstructed by paperwork.”

This answer seemed to pacify Will and he nodded, walking over to take his seat in the center of the room.

“Jack thinks I’m going to pick up and leave everything behind after what happened.”

“What’s stopping you?”

Will sat back in his seat pondering the question. Hannibal was wondering as well. After all, if past experiences were any indicator, Will should be halfway across the country starting a whole new life by now.

“Last time I felt like what happened to me coloured everything around me. The very air I breathed was suffocating. I had to go someplace that didn’t have those memories attached to it.”

“And this time?” Hannibal prodded.

Will fidgeted with his sleeve for a moment before replying.

“This time the world doesn’t feel like it’s crumbling at my feet.”

“Trauma can affect us differently at different points in our lives. There isn’t one way anyone is supposed to react to these kinds of events.”

“It’s not that it didn’t affect me at all,” Will stated, stopping to carefully think over his words. “After I was stabbed I was afraid. I was always looking over my shoulder. The ghost of David Campbell followed me everywhere I went. This time I’m not afraid. But I think the alternative may be just as bad.”

“And what might that be?”

Will stood up and walked towards one of the large windows, peering outside for a moment before turning around to face Hannibal again.

“Guilt” Will admitted.

Will had nothing to feel guilty for. He shot a man in self defence. The wound wasn’t a life threatening one either, he hit Stammets in the arm. The man was going to make a full recovery.

Unless he had wanted to kill him.

“Guilt is a wasted emotion. You should not feel guilty for your actions in this case.”

Hannibal had a policy to never feel guilty for anything. Why should he? He treasured every moment of his life as he knew in an instant it could all disappear. Everything Hannibal enjoyed from cooking to killing was something he refused to regret. He wished he could free Will from the confines of his guilt, but that was something that would come in due time.

“I saw Eldon Stammets when I went to the shooting range the other day. Or more accurately I hallucinated him.”

Hannibal got up from his chair and then took a few cautious steps towards where Will stood by the window.

“What did you see Will?”

“I felt like I killed him,” Will choked out, clearly unnerved by the words he was saying.

“You did not kill Eldon Stammets.” Hannibal fought to keep his expression neutral. He could not let Will see how thrilled he was with the turn of their conversation.

“But I wanted to,” Will looked directly into Hannibal's eyes as he said this.

For a moment Hannibal was distracted by the image of Will illuminated by the dim light of the room. He looked almost relieved to be voicing these thoughts aloud, likely for the first time, freeing them from the bone arena of his skull. His eyes searched Hannibal's, looking for revulsion or disgust but he wouldn’t find it. Will looked stunning like this. But soon the moment passed and Will’s gaze shifted elsewhere.

“Then why didn’t you?” Hannibal didn’t really expect an honest answer to this but he wanted him to think about it.

“I took the consulting job with Jack to save lives.” Will ambled towards the ladder to the second story. They stood there for a while in silence. Not an uncomfortable silence, more like a contemplative one.

“If your intention was to kill him, it’s because you understand why he did the things he did. It’s beautiful in it’s own way. Giving voice to the unmentionable.”

Will leaned back against the ladder. “It’s called the unmentionable for a reason.”

“Your mind works differently than anyone I’ve ever met. You act like your condition is a curse when in reality it is a gift.”

Will paced towards his chair and back again. Hannibal regarded him with curiosity, waiting for him to speak. For a moment he was worried he had pushed Will too far.

“Are you reconsidering giving me a clean psych eval?” Will asked with humour in his voice, breaking the silence.

“Not at all. I will assure Jack that you are perfectly capable of doing fieldwork, if that is what you still wish to do.”

“It is.” Will said this confidently, he had thought about it a lot, Hannibal concluded. “You are going to need a way back from the dark places that Jack takes you.” Hannibal watched Will nod slowly. It was true. Will Graham would no longer be of such an interest to Hannibal if he was reduced to an avoidant mess after getting too deep in crime scenes.

“Despite the psych eval, you still aren’t my psychiatrist Dr. Lecter,” this time Will said this in a lighter tone, wagging a finger and looking up at Hannibal from underneath his eyelashes.

Hannibal smiled. “Of course not, we are simply having conversations. But I must ask you to let me know when Jack takes you to a place you feel like you can’t escape.”

“I can do that,” Will agreed.

“See that you do. This job at the FBI is not worth losing your mind over.”

“Watch out doctor, you are starting to sound like Alana Bloom.”

Hannibal raised his eyebrows in mock offense. “I should hope so, I was her mentor after all.”

“Ah, it’s all starting to make sense now,” Will teased.

“She is a smart woman. You should listen to her.”

“Well she is always telling me I need to talk to someone about what’s kicking around in my head. And look where I am now.” Will gestured to the room around him.

“I’m sure she will be quite pleased.” Hannibal wondered if this meant Will had some sort of personal relationship with Alana outside of work. He doubted it. Will wasn’t exactly the social type.

“I’m sure she will be. Hopefully she’ll get off my case about the whole mushroom killer thing.”

“Alana can become passionate about those she cares about.” Hannibal watched as Will’s cheeks flushed a little at this.

“I just wish that she would call less, that's all. And Jack too.”

Hannibal could imagine the two of them phoning in to check on Will. He was certain Alana was calling because she genuinely did care, but Jack certainly had an ulterior motive. He probably wanted his prize pony back in the stable.

“Jack is afraid that he’s broken you. That he’s let you get to close.”

“He’s worried I might have brought something back with me,” Will admitted with a shrug. “And he’d be right.”

“We all take something from each interaction with those around us. You even more so than others. I’ll do my best to ease Jack’s worry. Whatever you have brought with you from Eldon Stammets is not of his concern.”

Will leaned forward and clasped his hands together.

“Thank you for the evaluation Dr. Lecter, but I really must be going.”

Hannibal walked towards the exit, opening it so Will could leave. “It was my pleasure Will. Truly.”

Chapter End Notes

I'm halfway done the next chapter already so the next update should come in a few days. Big thank you for everyone who's stuck around this far!

Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Over a week went by before Jack finally let Will work on a new case. He assumed Dr. Lecter had been filling in on whatever case had come up while Will was out of commission but hadn't called to ask. In fact the psychiatrist had been radio silent since their last meeting. Will figured the doctor was waiting for him to call first but he hadn't cared enough to find out.

Will was allowed to go back to teaching after Dr. Lecter gave Jack the all clear on his psych eval, but Jack was still cautious about putting him on a case.

He was lying on his couch reading an old psychology textbook he still had from university when Jack finally called.

"Will I have a case for you" Jack grunted into the phone before Will even had a chance to say hello. "We think the Chesapeake Ripper may have reemerged."

Will sucked in a quick stream of air through his nose. The Ripper had always fascinated him. Will had been following the case for years in awe of how this killer was truly an expert in his field. There was no one else like him. This was made even more evident by the fact the FBI had never even come close to catching him even after he murdered a trainee. The Chesapeake Ripper was Jack's white whale, and Will realized how important this case would be to him.

"We don't know for sure yet but the victim was found in a hotel room bathtub. There were abdominal mutilations and organ removal on the scene" Jack continued.

Will rubbed a hand over his face, thinking. This didn't feel right to him.

"Sounds more like an urban legend than the Chesapeake Ripper, no?"

"That's why I called you. I'll make sure nobody touches the body. I want you to have a look."

"Okay, I'm ready. Send me the address and I'll be right over" Will hurried, putting his textbook down and grabbing his jacket which was hanging on the wall.

"Don't worry about it, I'm sending a car. It'll be there in 15 minutes."

Will huffed loud enough for Jack to hear and hung his coat back where he got it. It was clear Jack still didn't trust him.

Before the car arrived Will grabbed a bottle of aspirin, washing down two pills with a glass of water. He could feel a headache coming on and was certain that a crime scene would not help it.

After an excruciating car ride with an agent Will had never even met before, he finally arrived at the crime scene which was a seedy looking hotel.

Luckily there wasn't a lot of press outside. Will did a quick scan of the small crowd and breathed a sigh of relief when he didn't see the mop of red curls he associated with Freddie Lounds. She seemed to have it out for him for reasons he couldn't quite pinpoint. Maybe it was partly because he refused to do an interview with her. She seemed like the type to get hung up on petty details like that. But it was just as likely that it was simply because he made an interesting story.

When Will walked into the hotel room there were already lab techs scurrying around taking photos and carefully placing evidence into tiny plastic bags. Jack stood in the middle of the room surveying his team.

"Will, I'm glad you're here. Fresh crime scene as promised. Well mostly fresh," Jack glared at Zeller and Beverly who were standing on one side of the room.

"It looks as if surgery was performed and then unperformed" Beverly said, looking over to Will who was awkwardly adjusting his glasses.

"Surgery was unperformed with bare hands. The sutures were clawed open" Zeller added, waving his arms around for effect.

"Pieces of him were torn off from the bed to the bathroom. Like breadcrumbs" Price chimed in.

Will grabbed a pair of blue nitrile gloves and put them on before slinking over to where the body lay in the tub. He took off his glasses folding them into his shirt pocket. He would need to see this without any barriers.

He knelt down next to the bathtub, inspecting the body which was wearing a white t-shirt, covered in bloody handprints.

"Surgery didn't happen here. There would be a lot more blood" Will commented to no one in particular.

"If he's moving them, he would have to have some kind of transport," Beverly responded.

"Find the car, find the killer" Price agreed.

Will didn't look up at these comments, he barely even heard them. He was so focused on the gaping wound on the man's torso.

"He tore open his own sutures," Will mumbled, barely audible.

"It wasn't to get to his kidney, the Ripper already took it with him" Beverly stated.

Jack rolled his eyes. "What did he take from the chest?"

"He tried to take the heart. He was probably interrupted. It's still intact" Zeller answered.

Will leaned forward. He was done with the trio of lab techs distracting him. As if Jack read his mind, he demanded everyone leave the room.

Will closed his eyes seeing the pendulum swing back and forth.

Swish. Swish. Swish.

Signs of a struggle indicate he's suffering from a severe, violent emergence from deep sedation.

He saw the man touch his wound and gasp when he pulled his hand away covered in blood. He was shaking, and stumbled forward grabbing Will for support which knocked him off his balance. Will grabbed the man by the shoulders struggling against his grip, finally over powering him and throwing him in the bathtub. Will leapt into the bathtub after him and straddled the man who was now bleeding out.

His heart seizes up.

Will tore open the white t-shirt with a scalpel he held in his bare bloodied hands.

I open his chest wall.

I spread the ribs.

I take his heart in my hand.

Internal cardiac massage.

The sound of a heartbeat fills Will's ears until it's the only thing he can hear.

This is not my design.

Will's eyes fluttered open. He was back in the present, alone in the hotel room, standing over the body.

"J-Jack" he called out feebly. Jack burst back into the room. He must've been standing right outside the door.

"What is it Will?"

"This wasn't brutal. This killer wasn't killing, he was trying to save his life." Will turned around to face Jack, putting his glasses back on as armor. "The Ripper ever do that?"

Jack just stared at him.

"It's not the Ripper Jack" Will said definitively.

Zeller stomped back into the room. "Oh come on. There are too many similarities."

"There aren't enough" Will asserted without looking up at Zeller who was almost definitely rolling his eyes.

Zeller sighed dramatically. "Knife wounds are cuts, not stabs. Anatomical knowledge, dissection skills, mutilation, organs removed, victim clothed, on display. We got 22 signature

components all attributable to the same killer."

"22 possible signature components" Will corrected.

"I mean come on. It's the Ripper" Zeller practically yelled. Will stood up and shut the bathroom door in his face before he could say anything else.

"Are you sure?" Jack asked. They were the only two in there now.

"More or less."

This was passionless. It lacked flavour. Every piece that the Ripper did was intentional. They were created with a specific message in mind. Almost elegant. He'd never seen artistry quite as precise as the Rippers.

"Tell me why."

"The Ripper left a victim in a church pew using his tongue as a page marker in the bible he was holding. This is not that. This is a nurse or a medical student trying to make an extra buck in a back alley surgery and it went bad. Very bad."

Jack slammed his fist against the bathroom sink. "I wanna catch him Will" he confessed.

"And you will," even as Will said it, it sounded weak. "Eventually."

Jack stormed out of the room after that. Deep down he probably knew Will was right but he was so dead set on catching the Ripper he would ignore it.

The next day after class, Will was to head over to the behavioural science unit to go over the autopsy and talk about the Chesapeake Ripper, which he knew would be a complete waste of time.

When he walked in, the three lab techs and Jack were standing around the corpse from the hotel the night before.

"Will you're late" Jack boomed, clearly in a bad mood.

"Sorry," Will muttered. He wasn't.

"Tox screens say the victim was sedated and given pain killers" Beverly announced trying to break the tension in the room.

This further confirmed for Will that the Ripper didn't do this. "The Ripper never gave any of his victims sedatives. He wanted them to feel everything. He took their organs when they were still alive."

"You still think he was ripping out a heart to save a life?" Zeller mocked.

"Yes," Will pushed his glasses up on his nose, looking at Zeller's shoes.

“Well Freddie Lounds seems pretty convinced,” Jack said. Will gave him a puzzled look. Freddie Lounds wasn’t even at the crime scene. Jack passed him with a tablet with Tattlecrime open on it to Will.

There were pictures of the scene probably taken and sold by a local police officer or one of Freddies mysterious FBI informants. The headline read *Chesapeake Ripper Returns After Two Year Hiatus*. The contents of the article weren’t particularly interesting, mostly just theorizing about the Ripper and condemning the FBI for failing to catch him. Will was just grateful that the article wasn’t about him this time.

“You’re putting your faith in Freddie Lounds?” This was a new low even for Jack. The fact that he was resorting to Freddie Lounds as evidence showed just how desperate he was to catch this killer.

“No. But it’s not a coincidence that she came to the same conclusion. All the elements are there.”

“You are really telling me you think he had a change of heart and decided to start sedating his victims?” Will laughed without any humour. This whole thing seemed ridiculous to him. How could nobody else see it?

“You’re right I can’t justify that,” Jack grumbled. Surely he could see he wasn’t thinking this through.

Beverly took a step in between them. “Well if this isn’t the Ripper he certainly isn’t going to be happy to see someone else’s dodgy work is being attributed to him.”

“You think he will start killing again because of this?” Price questioned.

No. He wouldn’t want anyone to conflate his work with someone else's. He won’t kill until the time is right.

“We will know whether or not it’s him in the next few days. The Ripper always kills in sou-groups of 3 or 4,” Will nearly slipped on that one. He had privately been calling these groups of killings sounders for a while now but if the rest of the team heard him referring to murder victims as groups of pigs they would think he was crazy. That is how the Ripper thought of them though. They were pigs to him, disgraceful and less than human. But Will didn’t want to explain this to anyone, no one else would understand.

“Unless I was right and he was caught in the act. Maybe he won’t want to risk exposing himself,” Zeller added.

That was unlikely. Will couldn’t imagine the Ripper being unable to finish his work. He was smarter than that. And he certainly would not be caught with a half cut up victim in a bathtub. That was inelegant.

“What are you thinking Will?” Jask questioned.

Will looked down at the corpse that sat in front of him like some sort of brutal centerpiece. It was almost funny they were having this conversation over a dead body as if it were simply a prop or a display.

“The Ripper is a perfectionist. Every single one of his displays has a purpose. They are crafted down to the smallest details. Everything he does is thought out and performed flawlessly. He doesn’t leave anything up to chance. He wouldn’t be caught in the act.”

“How do you know that this isn’t just another fancy display that we haven’t found the meaning of yet?” Jack asked. His brow was furrowed and it was clear he was losing confidence in his own theory.

“The Chesapeake Ripper has surgical skills. He has spent years honing his craft.” Will pointed at the corpse, “whoever did this is not an expert. He has basic anatomical knowledge but he’s nowhere near the level of the Ripper when it comes to skill and precision. This is sloppy work Jack. The Ripper would never settle for anything less than perfection.”

Jack looked down, tilting his head in defeat. “If the Ripper didn’t do this, who did?”

“Could it be organ harvesters?” Will blurted out. It seemed unlikely but hopefully the theory was enough to appease Jack.

“A subtle twist on the old waking up in an ice bath missing a kidney legend? I like your style Graham,” Beverly said with a smirk.

Price’s face lit up with excitement. “It’s possible, kidneys fetch a high price on the black market.”

Jack’s brows furrowed. “Could an organ harvester be disguising their work as that of a serial killer?” He looked up at the lab techs. Clearly he wasn’t giving up hope on the Ripper yet.

“It would explain the surgical trophies.” Zeller confirmed, crossing his arms lazily.

“I’m not sure that would explain the intricate displays. I would assume organ harvesters would want to keep their work underground.” Beverly argued.

“It’s good enough to be a working theory” Jack asserted. “Katz, I want you to go through the security footage from the building across from the hotel again. Make sure we didn’t miss anything. And you two-” he pointed at Price and Zellar, “go over the Ripper's victims to see if it’s possible the organs were taken for transplant.” Jack waived his hand and the three lab techs got right back to work. “And Will, you can go home. I’ll call you when I hear something.”

Will turned on his heel and headed out the door before he could change his mind. Once he got outside, he found himself reaching into his back pocket and pulling out his cellphone. He needed to talk to someone about this case that would actually listen to him, and only one person came to mind.

Dr. Lecter picked up on the third ring. “Will, I’m glad you called. I was about to call you myself and invite you to dinner.”

Will’s gut twisted slightly. Dinner? He had heard tales of the doctors famous dinner parties but he had never expected an invite. Will certainly didn’t fall in line with the usual company that Dr. Lecter kept. He wasn’t rich or fancy or mysterious. “Yeah, uh, okay sure. As long as you don’t mind going over a case with me.”

“Not at all. I hope my insight is of some value to you.”

“Thank you. I’m just about to leave Quantico now,” Will stated. He looked down at the state of his clothes. Luckily he had taught today so he was dressed a bit better than he would be normally. Still probably not well enough for a dinner at Dr. Lecter’s but it would have to do.

“Excellent. I’m looking forward to it.”

Moments after he hung up, Will looked down to see a text with an address in Baltimore attached to it.

When he arrived at the address which was just a few blocks away from the office, Will couldn’t help but stare with his mouth agape. It wasn’t like he was expecting anything modest but the place was huge.

He took off his glasses and popped an aspirin from the bottle in his coat pocket before stepping out of his car. He looked back at his vehicle thinking about how out of place it looked on this street.

Will took a deep breath before lifting his arm to knock on the front door. For a moment there was no answer and Will considered ringing the doorbell. But just as that thought passed through his mind the door swung open, revealing a man in a blue and green checkered vest over a dress shirt that was pushed up to his elbows.

“Hello Will. You arrived right on time. Dinner is almost ready,” Dr. Lecter said with a polite smile.

“Thank you for having me on such short notice.”

Will walked through the open door and immediately felt small as he scanned the entryway. The walls were lined with paintings in ornate frames, some of which he recognized and others he didn’t. Beautiful curtains lined the windows and the furniture much like the office, was almost certainly antique.

Will took off his coat and the doctor plucked it out of his hands and hung it up in a nearby closet.

He looked around the room at all the complex decorations and art. But what really caught Will’s eye was the harpsichord sitting near the far corner.

“You play?” He asked and immediately regretted it. *Why would someone have an instrument they couldn’t play?* Will cursed himself for his exceeding levels of social awkwardness.

“Yes. I learned to play when I was a young boy. In recent years I have started to compose as well,” Dr. Lecter replied elegantly.

Will thought about probing further on the mention of Dr. Lecter’s childhood but decided that was a conversation best left for another time instead he opted for a compliment.

“You have a lovely home.”

“Thank you Will. Follow me. I’ll show you to your seat.”

The doctor led Will through the house and into the dining room which was just as intimidating as the entryway.

Dr. Lecter showed him his seat saying he “would be back in just a moment” and suggested Will make himself comfortable.

He relaxed into his chair looking around at the dining room. The long table in front of him reminded Will of something a movie villain would own. If he was being honest, the whole house fit that theme.

The wall across from Will was covered in greenery, it seemed to be a sort of in door herb garden. Behind him, there was a large fireplace with some kind of horns or tusks framing a portrait of Leda and the Swan above it.

Controversial.

Will wondered if the piece of art ever started any debates or if the good doctor’s guests were too polite or intimidated to say anything about it at all. It was probably the latter, he decided. He couldn’t imagine a guest mustering up enough courage to comment on the erotic painting. That’s probably why it was there in the first place. Will imagined the doctor got a great deal of satisfaction over seeing his guests squirm.

When Dr. Lecter returned, Will noticed he had put on a jacket to match the vest and pants he was wearing. He was carrying two dishes, one of which he placed in front of Will.

“Loin, served with a Cumberland sauce of red fruits,” The doctor announced while pouring Will a glass of red wine he didn’t ask for.

The dish was presented meticulously, speaking to Dr. Lecter’s clear need for perfectionism.

“Mm this is delicious,” Will announced after taking a bite. He always thought of himself as a good cook but even after a single bite he was able to recognize the man sitting across from him was on a level of his own.

“Thank you,” Dr. Lecter replied with a smile before closing his eyes and lifting his fork to his mouth to take a bite for himself. “So, Jack has you back in the saddle?”

“He’s convinced the Chesapeake Ripper has returned.”

Dr. Lecter raised an eyebrow. “And you?”

Will shook his head. “It’s not the Ripper.” He took another bite.

“How can you be sure?” The doctor asked, leaning forward slightly.

“The victim was found gutted in a bathtub in some seedy hotel. There was no poetry. No meaning.” Will twirled his fork to emphasize this point.

“Is it important to you that his kills are meaningful?”

Will ignored the question. He wasn’t going to fully delve into the Ripper today. Especially when he wasn’t sure how Dr. Lecter would take his answer. Sure he’d put up with morbid conversations in the past, but there is only so much Will could say without sounding insane.

“I’m pretty sure whoever did it, didn’t intend for him to die. I think he was caught up in some back alley surgery scheme and it went wrong.”

“Perhaps it was someone overconfident about their surgical abilities,” Dr. Lecter suggested.

Will looked down at his fork. “I said the same thing to Jack. Told him it was a medical student.”

“And he didn’t listen?”

“He did not.” Will took a sip of his wine. He didn’t know much about wine but he could say for certain that this was more expensive than anything he’d ever drank before.

“Jack cannot see what he does not wish to see,” the doctor remarked, lifting his own glass to his lips.

“He’s desperate. Though I think underneath it all he knows I’m right.”

“Probably. But when he figures out it’s not the Ripper don’t be expecting an apology.”

Will laughed at that. “An apology? From Jack Crawford? Hell will freeze over before that happens. The look on Zeller’s face will have to be enough.” He noticed a slightly puzzled look on the doctors face and added, “a lab tech. He’s very confident it’s the Ripper and mocked me when I said otherwise.”

“I see. Overconfidence is a quality I find quite distasteful. Especially when that confidence is misplaced.”

“Likewise.”

“Do you have trouble with taste?”

Will reached up to adjust his glasses before remembering he left them in the car. “I have trouble with people mostly.”

“People not as forgiving as dogs?”

Will froze for a second wondering how Dr. Lecter would even know about his dogs. The day they met Will used his dogs as an excuse to leave. *Good memory.*

“Not just that. With most people I can pick up how they are feeling pretty quickly. When there are too many people around I can’t separate whose emotions are whose. Including my own. It gives me a headache.”

“Most people?” The doctor picked up on his slip.

“Not all people. Some are craftier at hiding things.” He looked up at Dr. Lecter, “like you.” He saw a miniscule twitch on the corner of the doctor's mouth.

“Starting to find me interesting then?”

Before Will could answer his cell phone started ringing. Normally he had it on silent so he jumped a little when the loud noise cut across the room. He fumbled around with it in his hand before picking up.

“Graham,” he answered.

“We have a lead. I’m sending a car to get you,” Jack said eagerly.

“Wait, Jack I’m not in Wolftrap,” Will blurted out.

“You’re not?” Jack paused. To be fair, it was practically a miracle Will wasn’t at home sulking. “Where the hell are you?”

“With Dr. Lecter in Baltimore.”

Jack hummed in approval. “So therapy does work on you after all.” Will wasn’t going to dignify that with an answer. “We think the killer is transporting the bodies using an ambulance. Katz caught one leaving the crime scene. We tracked it down to a local station, I’ll send you the address. It’s not too far away from where you are. Meet us there in 20 minutes, and feel free to bring Dr. Lecter with you.” Before Will could say anything else Jack hung up.

“That was Jack, they’ve got a lead on the hotel murder.”

“And he wants you there?”

Will stood up from the table. “The FBI is still working under the assumption it’s the Chesapeake Ripper,” he paused, “do you want to join me?”

“Of course. I would love a look into the inner workings of the FBI.” Dr. Lecter stood up and tucked in his chair before whisking the empty dishes away, back into the kitchen. “Shall we take my car?” He asked when he returned.

Will nodded knowing he would be embarrassed if the doctor saw the state of his car. It was full of dog hair and the floor was littered with old receipts and mud.

Once again he was led through the maze of the house back to the entryway. When they made it there, Dr. Lecter quickly put on his own overcoat before pulling out Will's jacket. He held it out in a clear move to help Will put it on. Begrudgingly he accepted knowing it would be rude not to.

The hair on the back of his neck britled as he felt Dr. Lecter adjust the collar of his jacket. His hands remained there for just a moment longer than they needed too before he pulled them away and grabbed his car keys.

When they walked out the door, Will noticed it was snowing. It was the first snowfall of the year and it melted the moment it touched the ground. Will always loved the snow as he never got to see it when he lived down south.

"You seem a bit too happy for someone who could potentially be on his way to catch a serial killer." Dr. Lecter must have noticed him smiling.

"No it's just that it's snowing. I didn't see much of it growing up."

"The novelty of it has long worn off for me."

The car Will was led to was a black Bentley which was exactly the kind of thing he expected the good doctor to drive. Tasteful, expensive, but not too flashy. When he got in, he noted how comfortable the leather seats were.

"Jack thinks I'm in therapy with you," he blurted out as Dr. Lecter got into his own seat.

Dr. Lecter started the car. "You did nothing to dissuade him from that notion."

"Maybe if he thinks I'm in therapy he'll get off my back. He thinks I'm unstable."

"Are you?"

"Yes." Will knew it was true. Mentally stable people don't hallucinate or wake up half naked standing on the roof of their house.

They sat in silence for the rest of the car ride with the exception of Will giving directions from his phone and classical music playing softly in the background.

When they arrived the parking lot was mostly empty and it was simple to spot Jack's SUV among a couple police cars.

Will got out of the car and noticed it was no longer snowing. He saw Beverly leaning against the SUV talking to Jack and a local officer.

"Hello Will, Dr. Lecter" Jack greeted and Will turned to see the doctor standing right next to him, he had taken off his overcoat now that the snow had stopped. "Want to help us catch the Chesapeake Ripper?"

Dr. Lecter smiled. "How could I refuse." For a moment Will thought he saw something behind his eyes when he said this.

Jack led them into the building and towards a chubby middle aged man carrying a clipboard.

“You must be the agent that called. My name's Rob Wilson,” the man said, shaking Jack’s hand.

“Agent Jack Crawford FBI. Can I see the ambulance I asked about?”

“Sure follow me.” Rob led them through the massive garage. There must have been a few dozen ambulances in there. “I must warn you the ambulance you asked about was checked in for repairs a few days ago. As far as my records are aware nobody has taken it out since.”

“Do your records say who signed it in for repairs?” Beverly asked from beside Jack.

Rob looked over his shoulder at her before looking down at his clipboard and answering, “Devon Silvestri. He’s one of our part time drivers. He hasn’t been in for a few days.”

“Does he want to be a doctor?” Will questioned.

“Yeah I’m pretty sure he’s studying to take the MCAT,” Rob answered before he froze in place.

Jack gave him a frustrated look. “What is it?”

“Well it was here this morning,” Rob insisted, gesturing to an empty parking spot.

“Evidently not anymore,” Jack growled. “Well… Is Mr. Silvestri working today?”

“He’s not on the schedule.”

Beverly crossed her arms and furrowed her brow. After a moment she asked, “is there GPS on that ambulance?”

Rob nodded. “Nothing fancy, consumer grade.”

Beverly smiled. “Digital trunk system. Jack, if the ambulance radio is on, I can use a DF sweep to find it.”

“Good. We are gonna catch him.” Jack started walking back the way they came.

Will noticed Dr. Lecter staring at him out of the corner of his eye, so he turned to face him.

“This is all very educational,” he said leaning in towards Will slightly.

“Not often you get a peak behind the curtain,” Will stated.

They walked backed to the car and waited a few minutes before Beverly got a hit on the location of the ambulance. Jack called a SWAT team to the location.

Dr. Lecter followed closely behind Jack’s SUV for the short car ride to the ambulances location. They parked a block away so as to not alert the killer to their presence.

“You ready? This kind of thing can be pretty grisly,” Will looked over to the man next to him looking for any sign of worry and didn’t find any. He looked way too calm for someone who could very well be about to walk into a crime scene.

“I was an emergency room surgeon for several years.”

“Still, you should prepare yourself.”

They stepped out of the Bentley and silently followed behind Jack, Beverly, and half a dozen SWAT officers wearing all black bulletproof gear. They kept their distance, standing about 20 meters away from the ambulance as neither of them were actual FBI agents.

They watched as two SWAT officers grabbed the back doors of the ambulance and swung them open while the rest of them lifted their guns, pointing them at whoever was inside.

Even from the distance he was standing, Will could see a frail looking man with large purple eyebags wrist deep in a patient's abdomen.

“Show me your hands” Jack warned, pointing his rifle at the man.

“I-I can't” the man stuttered. He was visibly shaking.

“Show me your hands,” Jack growled, finger on the trigger.

“He’ll die.”

Jack considered this for a moment before shouting, “Dr. Lecter!”

Dr. Lecter walked a few steps and jogged a few more before he caught up with Jack, with Will right behind him.

“I need you to assess the situation here doctor,” Jack asserted.

Dr. Lecter got into the ambulance gracefully and peered over the shoulder of the EMT. “He was removing his kidney. Poorly. I can stop the bleeding.”

Jack nodded. “Do it.”

The doctor whipped off his jacked and pushed up his shirt sleeves quicker than Will thought was possible. He grabbed a box of blue nitrile gloves, and placed one over one hand with a snap.

Will watched as Dr. Lecter worked, expertly slowing the bleeding within seconds. He was able to remain calm under pressure even though it would have to have been years since the last time he did anything like this.

Surgical skills.

“Have you got it?” Jack asked.

“I’ve got it.”

“Alright. Mr. Silvestri, put your hands behind your head and exit the vehicle slowly.”

Devon Silvestri complied. He was shaking violently now, clearly in way over his head. Will heard Jack yell at him to get on the ground and all of the agents crowded around Silvestri to arrest him.

But Will wasn’t paying attention to that. He took a few steps closer to the ambulance to watch Dr. Lecter work. It was lucky he was there or else the patient almost certainly would have died on scene.

Will wondered how it felt to have such power over life and death as Dr. Lecter had that moment. It both comforted him and scared him to know what those surgical hands were capable of.

Hannibal looked up from what he was doing at that moment and met Will’s gaze. His hair had fallen in front of his face, out of it’s typically perfect position.

Hannibal.

Will hadn’t thought of him that way before. He guessed it was only fair to be on a first name basis. After all, he had just had dinner at his house.

Will tried to break eye contact but it was if he was in a trance, lost in the doctor's eyes. It was Hannibal who looked away first when another ambulance pulled up.

Paramedics and EMTs streamed out of the ambulance to move the patient. Hannibal kept his hand firmly in place as they moved to the second vehicle. He instructed them on what medications and tools he would need with ease, as if he had never stopped working as a surgeon.

Will caught Hannibal’s eyes once more for a brief moment before the ambulance doors shut, and the vehicle headed off to the hospital.

Beverly offered to drive Will back to his car when she realized his ride had been whisked away to the hospital and he accepted.

She spent the entire car ride babbling about the case and how she knew Will was right the whole time, but he wasn’t really listening. He was too distracted thinking about what it would feel like to hold a dying man's kidney in his hands.

Chapter End Notes

I know a lot of this chapter is straight from the show but I thought it would be cool to write my own twist on a few of the cases. Plus I really love that ambulance moment and

just had to include it. Don't worry I have several original ideas for cases in future chapters, this story is not going to be a rehash of things you have already seen I promise. As usual thanks for reading!

Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

> I'm sorry this update took so long. I had 3 papers due this week for university that totaled over 20k words which was way to much writing for me to also update. It's crunch time at school and exams start next week so updates might be a little slow. But the good news is I decided to split this chapter in half as it still isn't finished and I really wanted to get an update out. This means the next half will come out sometime next week!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Boudin Noir from Ali Bab’s Gastronomie pratique,” Hannibal announced as he placed the dish in front of Jack Crawford. He watched as Jack brought a piece of the rare meat to his mouth.

“This is delicious,” Jack announced and he thanked him.

Hannibal had a supply of human meat on hand more often than not these days. He always tried to serve some to his guests when he had them. Especially if those guests happened to be esteemed FBI agents.

He hunted semi regularly and it was actually pretty rare for him to put his victims on display. In most instances he would try to waste as little as possible, opting to leave his victims as missing persons rather than art pieces. He only took on the Chesapeake Ripper mantle when he was inspired enough to create a masterpiece, and a dinner party would usually come soon after.

“I can’t remember the last time I had a home cooked meal as good as this,” Jack stated. Hannibal assumed that would have been never. Most people did not have the extensive kitchen he did or the talent for that matter.

“You don’t cook?”

“I try. Although, I don’t think I’d ever be able to make something like this,” Jack said, gesturing to the elaborate meal laid out before him.

Hannibal smiled. If there were ever a good reason to have Jack Crawford around it would be for the praise and admiration.

“I have practiced for many years. And it is fortunate I am able to acquire the proper *ingredients*.” Hannibal could never resist giving a little nod to the unorthodox nature of his meals. It was a delicious private joke he had all to himself. “So what ever came of that man from the ambulance?”

“He survived and as far as I’m aware is still in stable condition,” Jack answered. Hannibal nodded, careful not to show any expression on his face. Clearly even after all these years he still had it.

“I’m glad to hear it. I left as soon as we arrived at the hospital. I wasn’t sure he was going to make it.”

“He wouldn’t have if it hadn’t been for you. You saved his life.”

It was nice to save a life. It brought him back to his days of being a surgeon. Saving a life was nearly as thrilling as taking one. That’s why he had become a surgeon in the first place. It was unfortunate that he had to change professions. It was a necessary evil as his kills were obviously done by someone with surgical skills. He switched to psychiatry to ease suspicions.

Psychiatry could be equally as enriching though. Especially when he was able to dissect the minds of those he found to be interesting.

“So Will came back to see you.” Jack was clearly probing for information.

“He did. Though I must admit he has insisted that he is not technically my patient.”

Jack nodded thoughtfully, bringing another bite to his mouth. “Still, I’m glad he’s reached out. If he’s having issues I need to know about it.”

“Wouldn’t anyone? Our dear friend Will has been through a lot. He may be reliving darker times from his days in the police force. What he needs right now is stability.”

“I can’t say this line of work lends itself to stability,” Jack commented.

“Which is why you’ll have to be patient with him. Will Graham’s mind works so much differently than yours or mine.”

Jack chuckled, “that’s what makes him so effective.”

“Yes but I must warn you not to push him too far. Will is only effective if his mind is sharp.”

“That’s what you’re here for, doctor. To make sure his mind stays sharp.”

***

Will slumped down in his seat and looked out the window at the road ahead. It had only been a few days since his last case but for whatever reason it felt like it had been much longer.

Today he was riding in the passenger seat of Alana Bloom’s car. When Jack gave the two of them the case she had offered to drive Will and insisted his house wasn’t out of her way. This was almost certainly untrue but he was flattered at the implication she wanted to spend time with him. Or maybe she just wanted to make sure he was okay after the most recent Tattlecrime article on him.

It’s not like he didn’t see it coming. Will knew it would simply be a matter of time before Freddie Lounds was able to dig up information on his past.

The article was another front page hit, apparently the name Will Graham was able to sell a lot of papers. The picture Freddie used was the one she had taken of him outside the gun range and it was less than flattering considering he was stomping over to give her hell about following him around like some kind of paparazzi.

The article was surprisingly thorough even for Freddie Lounds. She had managed to get a hold of some of his old co-workers in law enforcement who had some less than thrilling things to say about how he was “always creepy” and how there was “definitely something wrong with him.” Somehow she had managed to make him look like a bad cop rather than a victim after quitting the force.

So far Alana hadn’t brought up the article but Will was certain she had seen it. She was probably just waiting for him to bring it up, which he was absolutely not going to do.

They were on the way to the Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane to interview a man who claimed to be the Chesapeake Ripper after murdering a night nurse in a Ripper-esque fashion. This was particularly helpful because if Freddie Lounds caught wind of the Ripper being in prison, it would almost certainly take her focus off of Will. After all he really wasn’t as interesting as she made him out to be, at least not in comparison with the Chesapeake Ripper.

Will was less than thrilled at the implication the Ripper had been caught. It was almost like finding out Santa Claus isn’t real. When he got the call from Jack his gut reaction was not to believe it, but after hearing a bit more about the case he wasn’t so sure. He would have to see the crime scene before he could make a judgement one way or another.

Will had always been confident that the Ripper would never be caught. He was too smart. He had never left a single piece of evidence behind. But if anyone was ever going to catch him, Will figured it would be him. He thought he was the only person who had the tools to figure out the Rippers pathology. To truly *see* him. So far this had been unsuccessful as for whatever reason the Ripper seemed to elude him. Usually after seeing a crime scene or even photos of one Will could leap into a killer's mind. With the Ripper this was much more difficult. It was as if he was trying to complete a puzzle blindfolded.

Will assumed the Ripper would be the hardest case he’d ever work on. Hearing that he’d been rotting away in some mental hospital for two years made his stomach twist. It wasn’t right.

Will reached into his bag and pulled out the file for the Ripper case. There had been thirteen murders linked to the Ripper so far (fourteen if you count the night nurse). Each sounder of killings happened in just a few weeks and afterwards there would be months or even years of silence. It had been over two years since he had last killed which is the longest period of silence yet.

Coincidentally it seems the man who killed the night nurse, Abel Gideon, had been arrested about two years ago which is what gave the theory he was the Ripper some weight. Well that

and the fact that Gideon actually fit the profile of the Ripper to a T. He was a renowned surgeon and would have the skills necessary to complete the intricate tableaus to which he confessed.

Will looked through the pictures in the file. One showed a man who was bisected at the waist found sitting across from himself in an abandoned bus yard. Another was of a woman who was found holding her cleanly decapitated head in her hands. All of the victims were missing organs.

The scene Will paid most attention to was the wound man. This was the most recent display and also the one Gideon had apparently recreated. The original seemed to be a recreation of an image of a brutalized man found in 14th and 15th century medical textbooks to teach students about different injuries and ailments they might come across.

It was brutal in every sense of the word, clearly meaning to provoke something in whoever saw it. It was intended as art.

He flipped to the recently added page which included several pictures of Abel Gideon's family massacred in their kitchen. Blood was splattered along the walls and each victim had clearly been stabbed or beaten an excessive number of times. It was overkill. Gideon wasn't painting a picture with this crime scene. It was as if he snapped.

"What do you see Will?" Alana asked. He had almost forgotten he was riding with her and immediately felt guilty for being such an awkward and silent passenger.

"The Ripper was always brutal but he was also precise. Every decision he made about these kills had been thought out down to the smallest detail. Gideon's family massacre seemed unplanned."

"He could have been devolving," Alana commented.

"He could have been, but it seems unlikely that he would go from such a meticulous design to something like this," Will gestured to the pictures in the file.

"Well you can ask him yourself and find out."

Will had figured he was only being sent to the BSHCI to take a look at Gideons crime scene. The thought of sitting down and getting to talk to the Chesapeake Ripper was exciting. However this aspect still did not curb his disappointment that this killer had been caged. "I guess I thought after all these years that the Ripper would be planning something big. Hearing he was in prison the entire time just doesn't sound like what I imagined him to be."

"To be honest I have my doubts as well. I've interviewed Abel Gideon twice, and while he is an intelligent psychopath I'm not sure he is organized enough to pull off the kind of murders the Chesapeake Ripper is known for," Alana stated, looking up at Will briefly before returning her eyes to the road.

This gave Will some comfort. "If he isn't the Ripper the real one will be angry if he hears someone else is taking credit for his work."

“You think he could be provoked into killing again?”

“I’m not sure. It’s possible. He’s certainly prideful and would be offended at the idea that anyone else could do what he does.”

Will looked back down at the file in his lap. If Gideon really was the Ripper, everything Will thought he knew about him was wrong. Maybe he’s losing his skill. He had to admit that with each case his episodes of sleepwalking were getting worse and this wasn’t a coincidence. He felt like a battery that was slowly wasting away.

“We’re here,” Alana said as she pulled into the parking lot of the BSHCI.

From the outside it didn’t look much different from a regular hospital. There was a lot of security of course but not as much as one might expect to be surrounding a building holding some of the states most notorious killers.

Will walked closely behind Alana as they entered the building. “I always feel nervous walking into these kinds of places,” he muttered.

“Why’s that?”

“I’m afraid they won’t let me back out.”

Alana giggled at this and gave him a playful nudge with her shoulder, “don’t worry I won’t leave without you.”

Inside, Jack Crawford stood there waiting for them. They all signed in at the front desk and an orderly led them down the hall to the facilitators office.

Inside the office the shelves were lined with various awards and scholarships though on closer inspection most of these awards were not all that prestigious. Most of them were from small local events or clubs from university. The man who owned this office was clearly trying to make himself out to be more impressive than he was.

“Dr. Frederick Chilton,” the man announced, offering his hand to Will who shook it.

“Hello Dr. Chilton, this is special agent Will Graham,” Jack declared, waving his hand toward Will before gesturing to Alana. “And I hear you are already acquainted with Dr. Bloom.”

“I am. Now Mr. Graham, I see you are wearing a temporary identification badge. So you’re not real FBI,” Chilton sneered.

“Will teaches at the academy,” Jack elaborated.

Chilton gave Will a condescending smile, “ah a teacher.”

Will pushed his glasses up on his nose. He was starting to feel a headache coming on and really wished he had aspirin with him. “We are going to have to see the crime scene while it’s still relatively undisturbed.”

“Oh I assure you for something so disturbing, it is quite undisturbed,” Chilton replied.

Will could already tell after only knowing him for less than two minutes he didn’t like him.

“Why was a prisoner left alone with a nurse in a high security psychiatric hospital?” Will didn’t bother hiding his disdain for the man in his voice.

“For the two years Abel Gideon has been at this hospital, he has been a model prisoner. He has given every appearance of cooperating with attempts at therapy. As dictated by the current administrator, security around him has been…” Chilton waved his hand dramatically, “relaxed.”

From the corner of his eye Will could see Alana roll her eyes at this. He fought the urge to smile. Alana clearly didn’t like Dr. Chilton any more than he did.

“Yes doctor I understand. Now, Will is going to have to see the crime scene with as much privacy as you can provide.”

Chilton smiled, “oh yes that thing you do. You’re quite the topic of conversation among psychiatric circles Mr. Graham.” Clearly he had been reading up on Tattlecrime.

“Am I?” Will groaned.

“Oh yes. You appear to have quite the cocktail of personality disorders and neurosis that make you an expert profiler.”

Alana sighed “he’s not here to be analyzed.”

“Perhaps he should be.”

“Not interested,” Will said flatly.

“We’d like to see the crime scene now,” Jack added, catching on to Will’s discomfort.

The same orderly that showed them to Dr. Chilton's office led them all towards the infirmary where the crime had taken place.

“Gideon had a fork tine concealed in the palm of his hand. When he was taken to the infirmary he used it to pick the lock on his handcuffs,” Chilton divulged.

“Where is he now?” Will asked, walking next to Alana and behind Jack and Dr. Chilton.

“In his cell. You’ll note the removal of organs and abdominal mutilations that are consistent with the Chesapeake Ripper.”

They had made it to the door of the infirmary. The orderly that had led them there quietly unlocked the door with his comically large ring of keys.

“We aren’t certain this is the Chesapeake Ripper,” Jack emphasized. He had clearly learned his lesson from the last case and was not going to be so quick to confirm it was the Ripper. At

least not until he got the word from Will.

“Oh you will be certain once you see what's behind this door,” Chilton sneered.

One by one they all walked through the door and into the infirmary. Will’s eyes widened when he saw the nurse in the center of the room. She had been impaled with over a dozen various medical instruments and her eyes had been gouged out. He had seen dozens of murders in the past but that didn’t mean they stopped affecting him. If anything it was the other way around.

Chilton’s confident demeanor shifted when he entered the room and he averted his eyes from the scene. This was clearly not something he was used to and while he was able to put on a brave face in his office, it was clear to Will that he was afraid of Abel Gideon. Chilton certainly believed Gideon was the Ripper whether that was the truth or not.

Will walked around the body slowly noting the placement of the medical instruments that were arranged in a very similar fashion to both the previous Ripper murder and the portrait of the Wound Man.

“The eyes weren’t gouged out in the original version,” Will mumbled.

Jack nodded, “the cause of death was different too. Gideon slit her throat with the open handcuff before he mutilated the body. The Ripper’s victim died during the mutilation.”

“Maybe this time he didn’t have enough time to relish in his kill. He needed to do it as quickly as possible before he got caught,” Alana pointed out.

“No” Will argued. “The Ripper wouldn’t give up his style. He would rather not kill at all than kill imperfectly. We know he’s patient, he doesn’t need to kill. He wants to.”

“The reason you failed and kept failing to catch the Chesapeake Ripper was that I already had him,” Chilton contested.

“It looks like the Ripper,” Will turned to face Jack, “but it doesn’t feel like him.”

“Alright I need everyone to clear out and give Will some space,” Jack bellowed.

Everyone cleared the room except for the orderly who insisted he had to supervise and Jack who stood in the doorway. Will sighed as he would have preferred more privacy but complaining wasn’t going to get him anywhere.

He took off his glasses and folded them neatly into the collar of his shirt. Will couldn’t make use of his abilities to the fullest extent with barriers in the way. He closed his eyes and took in a deep breath through his nostrils.

Swish. Swish. Swish.

Will was lying in a stretcher being rolled into the infirmary. He could feel the fork tine inside of his hand.

I'm waiting to make my move. I've spent years behaving myself. They'll never see it coming.

He was left alone in the room with just the night nurse. He could almost laugh at how naïve the staff were.

While she is turned away I pull the tine out of my hand and use it to pick the lock.

He stood up calmly and quietly before creeping over to where the nurse stood fiddling with some medical equipment. He grabbed her by the shoulders, startling her, before throwing her to the ground. The woman yelped but no one would hear her.

I take my thumbs and gouge out her eyes. My face will be the last thing she sees. I use the blunt end of the open side of the handcuffs hanging from my wrist to slice open her throat. It isn't the sharpest tool but I know how to expertly apply pressure in just the right place. She will die in less than a minute.

Will stood up and stepped back admiring his work. There was something missing from this picture.

I take an IV stand and expertly shove it through her body. This piece is inspired by one I've seen before. But it is not the exact same. This is my design.

Will's eyes fluttered open and he was back in the infirmary in the present. His headache had gotten worse since earlier. He turned around to see Jack still leaning against the doorframe. The orderly seemed to be staring daggers at him from across the room which wasn't a huge surprise. Anger and fear are common reactions people have when they see Will do his thing.

His hands trembled slightly and he fumbled with his glasses for a moment trying to put them back on his face.

"The brutalization was an afterthought. He intended to kill the night nurse but he didn't intend to do this until he saw her lying dead on the floor," Will voiced to Jack who had a contemplative expression on his face.

"That doesn't sound like the Chesapeake Ripper to me."

"No it does not" Will agreed though he still couldn't be absolutely certain.

Chapter End Notes

I know a lot of you guys are expecting Hannigram to happen soon so I thought I'd let you know a LOT has to happen before we get there. It's coming I promise but I did tag the story as slow burn for a reason. I really think it will be worth the wait!

Chapter 9

Jack and Will were led back to Dr. Chilton's office where both he and Alana sat patiently, having a conversation about Gideon's "fan mail."

Will wandered over to the window and looked up at the cloudy sky. It gave the world a gray hue as if all the colour had been sucked away, which felt rather fitting considering his current location.

He wanted no part in the conversation. Alana and Jack could deal with Chilton. Will had to keep his mind clear to be able to focus on the Ripper, and whether or not Abel Gideon was who he claimed to be.

"Most of the mail was sent in by researchers and PhD students looking for an interview. There were about half a dozen letters from lonely hearts asking for his hand in marriage," Chilton commented.

Alana gave the psychiatrist a stern look. "He butchered his entire family on thanksgiving."

Chilton shrugged, "there's no accounting for taste. Or intelligence," he said with a smirk.

Will turned around feeling the need to step in, "murdering his wife was impulsive. The Chesapeake Ripper is methodical, meticulous. That's why he is so hard to catch."

"Was so hard to catch," Chilton corrected in a whiney voice. Will rolled his eyes, there was no way he would change this man's mind.

"Will you be conducting a joint interview?" Chilton asked.

"No separate. We will compare and contrast," Alana replied firmly, glancing over at Will.

He nodded. "Well I know you are anxious to get on with it. You have talked to Dr. Gideon before?" Chilton asked in a tone that clearly indicated he already knew the answer to that question.

"Yes, two sessions before his trial. I wrote about him for the Journal of Criminal Psychology."

"Well he certainly remembers you. I've read your notes, of course. They were…" Chilton paused for a moment to think. "More or less helpful."

Alana didn't let the subtle jab phase her, instead she smiled sweetly. "I'm glad I was helpful."

"More or less," Will teased. Alana looked up at him and huffed out a small laugh.

"I'll go first," she asserted, standing up from her seat and straightening her pencil skirt with the palm of her hand.

Will and Alana were led to a large gate with bars on it. Will was told he would have to stay behind and only one interviewer would be allowed through at a time. The orderly also gave a long winded list of all the things they were not allowed to do while beyond the gate.

The metal gate opened with a loud buzz and Alana was instructed to step through. She looked back over her shoulder briefly and gave Will a weak smile.

He watched her walk away down the corridor, admiring her figure.

The flickering fluorescent lights of the hospital certainly weren't helping his growing headache so he closed his eyes and leaned back against the cold brick wall as the sound of the clicks of Alana's heels faded into the distance.

Will wondered if the reason he was so sure Gideon wasn't the Ripper was that he didn't want him to be. He was worried he couldn't trust his judgement on this.

After a few minutes he heard the orderly standing across from him swinging his keys around. Will opened his eyes and saw it was the same man that had been glaring at him earlier. But looking at him now Will wasn't so sure if it was glaring or something else entirely. The man's name tag was fairly small but Will could make out the words *Mathew Brown* on it.

The orderly caught him staring and used it as an opportunity to start up a conversation. "I saw what you did back there. Fascinating stuff," he drawled. He was standing a little more confidently than he had been before almost as if he were letting his guard down now that he was alone with Will.

"Thanks," Will responded, he wasn't exactly the small talk kind of guy and mostly hoped the orderly would just leave him alone.

"I've read all about you in Tattlecrime Mr. Graham."

This made Will's muscles tense for a moment. He would really rather not talk about that right now especially not from an intruding stranger. "All good things I hope," he said sarcastically.

"Don't worry I'm not judging. We're a lot alike you and me," Mathew rasped.

Will wondered what he could possibly mean, Freddie Lounds' articles weren't exactly flattering.

"I doubt that."

Mathew ignored this and continued. "So the infamous Chesapeake Ripper has been in prison all along."

"Dr. Chilton seems pretty confident," Will agreed.

"But not you?"

Will knew the orderly was baiting him but he didn't care. A part of him was actually kind of curious to see where this was going after the comment about them being alike. "No. The

Ripper won't be caught. Not like this anyway. He wouldn't slip up the way Gideon did, killing his whole family. Everything the Ripper does is intentional. From the placement of the bodies to the organs he takes. He wouldn't recreate a previous murder either. He would consider that a waste."

Mathew looked at him in awe. "It's pretty amazing what you can do Mr. Graham. All that just from looking at a crime scene for a few minutes." Something about the way he said it made Will's skin crawl.

"It's a blessing and a curse," Will shrugged.

"Maybe. This kind of talent is rare. You shouldn't put yourself down for it. If I were you I would be proud."

"I'm surprised that's what you got out of the Tattlecrime article."

"People see what they want to see. Especially when it makes for a more interesting story." Something flashed in the orderlies eyes. Will could almost see the madness lurking behind them.

"Dramatic stories sell the most papers," Will remarked.

"Don't worry about it. That nasty bitch Freddie Lounds doesn't know anything about you. Someone should really put her out of her misery."

Will almost laughed and probably would have if not for the serious tone in the orderlies voice. "And what? You do?"

Mathew took in a deep breath. "Not entirely. But I saw it when I watched you look at that crime scene."

Will folded his arms across his chest. He should have insisted he have the crime scene to himself without people watching. "Saw what?"

"They say you can think like a killer. That you can reconstruct the final moments before a murder just by looking at a crime scene."

Will nodded.

"When I watched you reconstruct Gideon's murder I saw a flicker of something," Mathew hummed. Will furrowed his brows in confusion before Mathew added, "enjoyment."

Will's eyes widened slightly but he did his best to keep his expression neutral. "You're wrong, " he snapped.

Mathew gave him a wicked grin, "guys like *us* need to stick together."

Will was about to tell him off when he heard the familiar clip clop of high heels walking towards him. He could've sighed in relief. He was more than done with this conversation.

Mathew smiled at him before turning around to let Alana through the metal gate with a buzz.

“Your turn,” she said with a smile as Will stood up from his position leaning against the wall. He gave Mathew a small nod as he walked through the gate.

Will wondered if he should tell someone about the encounter he just had with the orderly. It would be the right thing to do. A person like that shouldn’t be working at a mental institution. The screening process must be awful, which wasn’t surprising as Dr. Chilton was likely in charge of it. Though in the grand scheme of things he didn’t actually say anything that bad. Afterall it was pretty hypocritical of Will of all people to go after someone for being weird and creepy (though he hoped he didn’t come off *that* creepy). Maybe that is what Mathew meant when he said they were alike. Though Will knew that wasn’t true. Mathew was almost certainly an antisocial personality and he thought that Will was one too.

Will walked past several small cells each with a prisoner in a deep blue uniform. Some of the prisoners called out to him as he walked past while others didn’t even seem to notice his presence at all. He felt a pang of guilt thinking about how in another universe he could just as easily be one of them.

Will took a deep breath to clear his mind of all of the other people he had interacted with throughout the day. He needed to solely focus on Abel Gideon and by extension, the Ripper.

At the end of the hallway a chair was already pulled out in front of Gideon's cell. When the prisoner saw him he smiled wide.

“Well hello, I don’t think we’ve met,” Gideon mused.

“Hello Dr. Gideon my name is Will Graham, I’m with the FBI.”

Will pulled out the chair and started to sit down before Gideon interrupted him.

“You don’t have to sit so far away. I’m a cutter not a pisser,” he joked.

Will scooted the chair a little closer and took a seat. “I’m not sure what Dr. Bloom asked you during her questioning period so I apologize if I ask any repeat questions.” He knew he would be asking repeats. That was the whole point of doing separate interviews, to gauge the difference between answers.

“What is with all the interviews anyway? I was caught red handed. Literally. There’s no mystery as to whodunit. I did it.”

“The mystery is whether or not you are who you say you are.” Will looked up Gideon who was standing directly behind the bars, “or not.” He really hoped he would have a solid answer on that by the end of the interview.

“I never liked being called the Chesapeake Ripper. Maybe something a little more clever. Or at the very least original.”

“I’m not sure the Ripper would be bothered by something so trivial as the name the media calls him,” Will confessed, attempting to get a rise out of the surgeon.

Gideon huffed loudly. “I’m not bothered. Just an observation.”

“Is that why you didn’t come forward until now? Because you didn’t like the name?” Will was trying to provoke him. He was sure the Chesapeake Ripper would be able to remain calm under this line of questioning, but Abel Gideon? Not so much.

“I didn’t come forward because I liked watching the bureau chase their tails from the box seats.”

“Two years of it. You must be a very patient man.”

“Are you just going to run me through the MMPI? My personality has already been cataloged and inventoried in every possible way.”

Will imagined this was true. Chilton would’ve thrown every test possible at Gideon.

“What changed your mind about watching the goose chase? After all, the FBI may never have figured it out if you hadn’t come forward. You could have had front row seats for years to come.”

Gideon backed away from the bars and began slowly pacing in his cell. “The novelty wore off. I was bored.”

“I’m sure FBI interviews must be more interesting. Better than talking to Dr. Chilton I presume?”

“That isn’t particularly difficult to achieve,” Gideon said snarkily. Apparently he too found Dr. Chilton insufferable.

Will shifted slightly in his seat. “So you came forward for attention then.”

“I am the Chesapeake Ripper Mr. Graham. I don’t need to convince you of that,” he said with a bite.

“I think that’s exactly what you need to do,” Will felt his lips curl slightly and he fought to keep his expression flat. He could feel Dr. Gideon's odd sense of humour from through the bars.

Gideon stopped pacing and grabbed one of the bars of his cell tightly. “What is it you would like to hear?” He snarled.

“If you were the Ripper you would’ve needed to have a reason to kill the nurse after all these years. What was the effect you hoped to have by killing her?”

“The effect I was hoping to have was her death. Is that not reason enough?”

“After two years of waiting I would’ve expected the Ripper to come up with something a little more substantial than a repeat of his last kill.”

Gideon smiled wide, baring his teeth as he caught Will's mistake. "My last kill was that trainee. I believe her name was Miriam Lass."

"Of course. We never found her body. Where is she? Why didn't you put her on display?"

"Who's to say I didn't?"

Will knew this line of questioning wasn't going to go anywhere so he instead asked the question he really wanted the answer to. "Why the surgical trophies?"

"Well there are just some things you are not allowed to do in a state facilitated operating room," Gideon mused, peeling his hand back from the bars.

Will was confident that the Ripper would have to have a reason for taking the organs. He was compelled to, and Gideon's joking attitude did not convey that. "See I think we both know that isn't true."

"Haven't you seen the crime scene? I think there is plenty of evidence there."

"I have. Which begs the question, how did you know how to recreate the crime scene?"

Gideon exhaled in annoyance. "Maybe because I was recreating it from memory. How else would I have been able to do it so accurately?"

This was true, afterall photos of the original wound man crime scene had never been released to the public. But they were released to those who were on the Chesapeake Ripper case. Will realized that Dr. Chilton had been consulting on the case during the last set of murders and would have access to those photos. He could have convinced Gideon he was the Ripper.

"Thank you for your time doctor. I think I have everything I need."

Will stood up and returned his chair to its previous position. Chilton would have everything to gain if Gideon was the Ripper. He would get plenty of attention which he very clearly craved. Maybe even a book deal if he was lucky, and being the head of the BSHCI he wouldn't have to grant interviews to anyone else if he didn't want to.

Will didn't think Chilton did this out of malice. It was much more likely he really thought Gideon was the Ripper. He'd likely convinced himself of this long ago. The man is clearly a bumbling idiot and it seemed perfectly in character for him to make this kind of assumption.

When he got back to the gate Will could see that Alana was gone. Probably back to Chilton's office or somewhere else private to talk with Jack. This meant he was alone with Mathew Brown once again. He shivered at the idea.

"Get everything you needed?" The orderly asked.

Will nodded, "I think so. I'm sure of it now. He's not the Ripper."

"Good eye Mr. Graham."

Will turned to leave and could feel the orderly approach him from behind. Mathew walked up to him, invading his personal space, and slid a business card into his hand. “In case you need a favour,” he whispered.

Will nodded and hurried away, attempting to spend the least amount of time possible in the orderlies unwavering gaze.

He suddenly felt dizzy and started walking in the direction of where he thought he had seen a bathroom earlier.

He tucked the business card in his pocket, he probably wasn’t going to contact Mathew Brown but it was oddly nice knowing he had the option. Will wasn’t the morality police and Mathew hadn’t actually done anything. But if he was being honest with himself, he didn’t want to turn the orderly in because he was curious about him. And curious about what he would do if Will asked.

He pushed those thoughts out of his mind. He did not need a pet psychopath.

He found the bathroom and stumbled in, relieved to find it unoccupied. It was a small single stalled bathroom with a glaring fluorescent light on the roof.

The light made Will’s head throb and he flung himself over to the sink. He hung his head down and his dark curls fell over his face.

Will was glad that Gideon wasn’t the Ripper but he’d forgotten about one glaring detail. That meant the Ripper was still out there and would strike again. Probably soon. And Jack was going to expect Will to catch him.

It all felt like too much. This job was definitely messing with his head.

Another wave of nausea hit him, and Will found himself dry heaving over the sink. At least nothing came up. That would make for a miserable drive back to Virginia.

He looked up at himself in the mirror. *Pull yourself together*. He thought bitterly at his pale reflection.

He turned on the tap and closed his eyes to splash water in his face and when he opened them he was in the passenger seat of a car.

Will gasped looking around frantically. He saw Alana was seated beside him and realized they must be on the way home from the hospital. He looked up at the digital clock on the dashboard and realized it had been over an hour since he finished his interview with Gideon. He had lost time.

“Did I fall asleep?” Will asked, trying to give Alana an explanation for his odd behavior. He certainly wasn’t going to tell her he didn’t remember leaving the BSHCI. She would freak out and tell Jack and he might force him to take another week off. Or worse, he’d send Will back to the classroom permanently.

“Probably. You seemed really out of it after the interview. Did everything go okay?”

“Yeah just a headache. Sleep definitely helped,” Will lied. He wondered if this had something to do with his sleepwalking problem.

“Well it’s a good thing we are almost back to Wolftrap.”

The next few minutes went by in awkward silence as Will shrunk into his seat wondering what he was going to do. He always knew he was a little crazy, but this was different. And it seemed like his problem was escalating.

When they pulled up to his house, Alana stepped out of the car. “You really don’t look so good. I’m worried about you.” Which was reasonable considering he suddenly felt really dizzy again.

“I appreciate the worry but I’m just tired.”

Will opened the door to his house letting Alana walk in first.

“I think these crime scenes are getting to you,” she stated, stepping into his home.

Will couldn’t exactly deny that so instead he just nodded. “Don’t they get to everyone? You’d have to be a sociopath to be totally okay with all the things I see on a daily basis.”

“That’s not what I meant,” Alana said softly while she absently ruffled one of his dogs ears.

“Harley seems to like you,” Will murmured before taking off his jacket and hanging it on the usual hook. He offered to take her coat as well which she politely declined.

“I can’t believe you have seven dogs,” Alana smiled at the collection of strays that sat before her, eagerly waiting for their turn to be pet, with notable exception of Winston who was hiding under a table.

Will felt his cheeks flush. “Yeah it’s a bright red flag isn’t it?”

“Actually I think it’s one of your most admirable traits.” Alana looked down at the ground and then up to Will’s face and he took a few steps towards her.

“You don’t need to worry about me so much. I know my limits. I’ll be okay.”

Alana sighed. “I know, it’s just after everything with the mushroom killer I felt guilty for letting Jack put you in the field. I care about you and I don’t want to see you get hurt.”

Will’s head was still spinning and he felt like he could pass out. It was the same feeling he got in the BSHCI before he lost time.

He reached out and put his and on Alana’s waist, drawing her in a little closer. He did this partly for balance and partly because of how she looked in the dim light of his living room. She looked up at him expectantly.

Will took the cue and leaned down to kiss her hoping this would help him ground himself.

She kissed him back softly and ran her hand up his arm. Alana was warm and soft and a great kisser which made Will realize it had been over a year since he had last kissed anyone.

He realized the world around him had stopped spinning and now everything was almost eerily still. Hopefully it would stay that way for the foreseeable future. Will was worried the moment the kiss broke he would lose time again. Pushing the thought out of his mind, he pulled her closer, feeling the warmth of her body against his.

Alana pulled back hesitantly but her face remained inches from Will's. He could still taste her chapstick.

"We shouldn't," she shook her head slowly

"Why not?" Will asked, tucking a strand of her chocolate coloured hair behind her ear.

"I wouldn't be good for you." Will rolled his eyes at this, she was looking at him with that pitying look he hates. "And you wouldn't be good for me," she added.

Will nodded "I'm sorry."

"Don't be, it was a great kiss. But the way I am in relationships, not that this is a relationship is-"

"It's okay Alana," Will interrupted, dropping his hand from her waist and stepping back slowly.

"I think you're unstable Will."

He smiled slightly at that. She was right after all. It would never work. Will wasn't exactly the "relationship" kind of person. He was more of a "live alone with seven dogs" kind of person. Kissing her was a mistake and was likely going to make seeing her at work awkward for the foreseeable future.

"I should get going, I still have quite the drive home."

Will watched as she walked out the door. When it closed behind her and he was alone once more, he began to feel a sense of dread gripping his throat as the world around him began to spin once more.

Chapter 10

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Hannibal watched the opera singer attentively, holding on to every single note. She was an up and coming soprano, and he felt extremely grateful for the opportunity to see her perform, especially at such an intimate venue.

The performance was being held at a local museum meaning there weren't a great number of seats to be had, though all the seats available were taken. Because of the limited number of people, Hannibal was able to notice Franklyn Froideveaux glancing at him from across the aisle every few seconds trying to get his attention.

Hannibal pretended he did not notice but he most certainly did and was frustrated by the distraction from the show. Now more than ever he really had to find Franklyn another psychiatrist.

When the performance concluded, he was the first one to his feet. Hannibal was not going to let Franklyn's presence distract him from the show. In fact it was so enthralling that it brought a single tear to his eye.

Hannibal had never been one to be embarrassed of his emotions. He often found himself hiding anger and frustration from people but that was because he didn't want to become a suspect when every person who frustrated him was found dead. He was a master at not letting his feelings show on his face when he did not want it to, but when it came to enjoyment he decided it was important to show some emotion to humanize himself in the eyes of those around him. After all, the sensitive man who openly cries at the opera simply *couldn't* be a serial killer.

The rest of the audience followed his lead and gave the young woman a standing ovation.

Soon the crowd dissipated and people gathered in smaller groups to socialize. Hannibal spoke to several acquaintances that he saw frequently at these social gatherings. He had to keep up appearances after all. They talked about music, wine, and Mrs. Komeda urged him to host another dinner party considering it had been over two years since his last one. *Soon,* he thought.

Mr. Komeda reappeared soon after that and he ushered her over to the bar to grab another drink.

Hannibal noticed Franklyn standing sheepishly next to a well dressed black man. He recognized the man as someone he had seen once or twice at the symphony but he had never actually spoken to him before. The man stood much more confidently than his companion and when he saw Hannibal was no longer busy, he walked over to introduce himself with Franklyn in tow.

“I noticed Franklyn’s eyes were wandering throughout the performance. Mostly towards you,” the man stuck out his hand which Hannibal shook firmly. “I’m Tobias Budge.”

“Dr. Hannibal Lecter,” he offered in return.

Up close he noticed a blankness to Tobias’s expression. Most wouldn’t give it a second glance but due to his profession Hannibal had a heightened awareness for these sorts of things.

“Tobias owns the Chordophone string shop in Baltimore,” Franklyn bragged, proudly smiling at Tobias.

“I do need to get my harpsichord restrung. Maybe I should stop by,” Hannibal pondered looking for an excuse to investigate Tobias further. There was something else to this man he was sure of it.

“Please do. We import some of the finest Italian catgut.” Tobias dug through the inside of his jacket for a moment before retrieving a business card. “Here is my card. You won’t find better quality anywhere else in Baltimore.”

Hannibal tucked the card into his own jacket and wondered if it might find it’s way to his rolodex. If he couldn’t kill Franklyn maybe Tobias could pay for his misdeeds. He likely would not. Tobias had not done anything egregious and Hannibal really did need someone to take a look at his harpsichord.

“I was trying to get your attention. I’m not sure if you noticed,” Franklyn said with a slightly shaky voice.

“I noticed,” Hannibal confirmed.

“Dr. Lecter is my therapist,” Franklyn informed Tobias who nodded and flashed his lifeless eyes at Hannibal in response.

“I see.”

Hannibal vaguely remembered Franklyn bringing Tobias up in several of their sessions. Seemingly he was Franklyns closest (and possibly only) friend though the feeling did not appear to be mutual.

“It would be unethical for me to acknowledge the nature of our relationship outside of my office without your explicit permission,” Hannibal commented. His ethics could be more than a little questionable from time to time regarding his patients, though he would not budge when it came to doctor patient confidentiality.

“Of course. So did you enjoy the performance? I thought this might be something you would like. That's not why I came of course,” Franklyn stumbled through his words clearly trying to come across as impressive but really just making a fool of himself. “It is something I like as well.” He laced his meaty fingers together to keep them from awkwardly fidgeting at his sides.

“Yes I certainly did.” Hannibal hoped if he answered vaguely enough the men in front of him would get bored and he would be able to make his exit. He would like to spend as little time around Franklyn as possible.

“Me too,” Franklyn chimed.

“Did you?” Tobias asked, furrowing his brow. “From my perspective you were barely paying attention. You were more focused on the audience,” he glanced up at Hannibal when he said this giving him a pointed look.

Tobias’s distaste for Franklyn was evident to the point Hannibal was surprised that Franklyn didn’t notice. Or maybe he simply didn’t care.

“Ah well we shouldn’t say too much now. We should leave something to talk about during our session this week,” he raised an eyebrow at Franklyn who smiled brightly at the attention.

“It was great seeing you doctor,” Franklyn announced.

Hannibal nodded politely and said nothing, taking the opportunity to make his escape. He could feel the two men’s eyes on him as he walked away.

He wondered why a man like Tobias would want to be friends with Franklyn. It seemed as though he couldn’t stand him, and Hannibal was certain it wouldn’t be difficult for him to find other friends. The only reason to keep Franklyn around was for *camouflage,* he decided. Franklyn would be a great distraction as he was much more eccentric making Tobias seem uninteresting by comparison. No one would notice Tobias’s soulless stare if they were too busy being annoyed by Franklyn. Hannibal applauded the effort.

He pondered about whether or not he should investigate Tobias further but his train of thought was completely diverted when he saw a man crumpled on his doorstep. For a moment he thought it might be a homeless person but on closer inspection he noticed the dark brown curls that could only belong to one man. It was Will Graham.

Will was sitting on his front step with his elbows resting on his knees and his head in his hands obscuring his face. He wasn’t wearing a jacket even though it was much too cold to be out without one.

Hannibal sat in his car for a moment longer admiring the tortured man before finally stepping out into the brisk evening air.

Will didn’t appear to notice him approaching until he was only a few feet away. He lifted his head and looked up at Hannibal with a softness to his eyes. He was clearly in distress.

“I’m sorry I shouldn’t have come. It’s just that I got in my car to go for a drive to clear my head and all of a sudden I found myself here. You weren’t home and I sat down for just a second and then-” Will was interrupted by the sudden chattering of his teeth. He was shivering and looked fragile curled up on the steps.

“It’s alright. You are welcome anytime. Let's get you inside.” Hannibal offered his hand to help Will get up, which he notably did not take and instead used the railing to lift himself onto shaking legs.

It’s rude to reject help, Hannibal thought to himself. He wasn’t actually upset. At this point Will’s improper behaviour was almost endearing.

“Are you sure?” Will questioned, rubbing his eyes with one hand. “I really don’t want to be any trouble.” He looked genuinely concerned and it struck Hannibal that his house was the first place Will thought to go.

“You won’t be. I meant it when I said you are welcome anytime.” He slipped past Will to unlock the front door.

Hannibal let Will in first then followed behind him. He started a fire in the fireplace in the living room and instructed Will to sit by it to warm up as his teeth were still chattering. Will looked hesitant at first, not wanting to accept help, but the warmth of the fire was enough to lure him in.

Hannibal slipped into his room to quickly change out of the tuxedo he had worn to the museum which he had miraculously not gotten ash on from the fireplace. He pulled on a charcoal grey sweater and black pants before returning to the living room a few minutes later and handing Will a cup of tea.

“Thank you,” Will murmured before taking a sip.

“Now, what happened?” Hannibal asked with concern, pulling up a chair across from Will.

Will looked towards the fire and Hannibal could see the flickering orange reflection in his eyes. “I kissed Alana Bloom.”

Hannibal felt his eye twitch slightly at that, though he was sure Will didn’t catch it.

“I see,” Hannibal said after a moment, not knowing what else to say. Will was clearly in a fragile state and he did not want to upset him further. “You’ve known her for sometime now. Why didn’t you make a move sooner?”

“I’ve always thought she was beautiful,” Will shrugged. He took another sip of his tea before setting his mug on the side table beside him. Hannibal felt a sting of annoyance at the fact he didn’t bother using a coaster. “But I guess I had never really thought about it.”

“Until today.”

Hannibal watched the firelight dance across Will’s features, giving him a glow that almost looked like it was coming from within.

“Until today,” Will agreed.

“That still doesn't explain why you drove all this way at this time of night to tell me about it,” Hannibal stated, not unkindly.

“She told me that she thought I was unstable. That we wouldn’t be good for each other,” Will admitted, while running one hand through his hair. Hannibal traced the movement with his eyes.

“From what you’ve expressed to me in the past I would think you would agree with that sentiment.”

Will nodded carefully. “I do. And she’s right. I wouldn’t be good for her.”

“We’ve spoken about how you feel unstable several times now. You told me you saw Eldon Stammets at the firing range. Have you been hallucinating more frequently?” Hannibal hoped that Will would elaborate but he did not want to push him.

Will sighed softly and Hannibal watched the rise and fall of his shoulders. This was clearly something that was difficult for him to talk about. “I’ve been sleepwalking,” Will said flatly. “And it's been escalating.”

“How so?” Hannibal kept his expression flat but his interest may have leaked through in his voice. Will was full of surprises.

“I woke up standing on my roof half naked in the freezing cold. And…” Will paused, furrowing his brows. He looked up and Hannibal could see the distress in his eyes. “I lost time today. One moment I was looking at myself in the mirror and the next moment I was in Alana’s car.”

“Is this the first time that’s happened?”

“I think so.” Will picked up his mug to take another sip, leaving a nearly perfect ring of condensation on the side table. “I felt dizzy and all of a sudden it had been over an hour and I didn’t remember where I was.”

“You were dissociating,” Hannibal observed.

“I got the same feeling when she dropped me off at my house.” Will’s posture softened as he spoke, clearly relieved to be getting this off his chest. “The world started spinning and I was scared I was going to lose time again. Then I saw her standing there looking at me and I kissed her.” The last few words tumbled out quickly as if he wanted to be rid of them.

“You were looking for something to ground you. To clutch onto for balance,” Hannibal surmised.

“I don’t know what’s happening to me.” Will frowned, forming a crease between his eyebrows.

“I told you I would help you out of the dark places Jack sends you. Where did he send you today?” Hannibal was fairly certain that the constant onslaught of crime scenes were getting to Will more than he had let on.

“The Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane,” Will answered in his usual cadence, punctuating every word.

It wasn't surprising that Will would feel unhinged after visiting a mental institution. "When you looked through the bars of the prison cell did you see yourself on the other side?"

"It isn't hard to imagine a world where I was the one sitting in one of those cells." His answer came much quicker and was more honest than Hannibal expected. Will was clearly beginning to trust him more and more and saw him as a source of stability.

"The people in that hospital are killers."

"I'm not a killer," Will asserted before softening his tone. "It's just not that hard to imagine that I could be. That anyone could be," he admitted.

"The bars of a cage separate man from beast. When a man is put into a cage he loses his humanity in the eyes of his captor."

"It's not that I see them as inhuman. In fact it's the opposite," Will shifted in his seat appearing to have a realization. "When you think about the kind of people that end up at a place like the BSHCI you think of monsters. But in reality they are so achingly and obviously human."

"Their humanity makes them easier to compare yourself to." The fire was flickering a little less than before and it was probably time to stoke it but Hannibal did not want to interrupt this conversation.

"Jack Crawford sent me there to confirm whether or not Abel Gideon was the Chesapeake Ripper. I was certain that he wasn't but I wasn't exactly sure why until now."

"And why is that?" Hannibal questioned, eager to pry the answer out of Will if he had to.

"Because Abel Gideon felt so distinctly human." Will paused before looking at Hannibal, not quite meeting his eyes. "And I am quite certain that the Ripper is something else entirely."

Hannibal was flattered by the description but it wasn't completely accurate. He didn't exactly see himself as more than human. Instead he saw the people he tortured and ate as less than. Despite that he was still impressed with Will's insight.

"Abel Gideon is a psychopath. A sadist that killed his family." He found it interesting that Will could speak with someone like Gideon and see a human rather than a monster. He wondered how Will would look at him if he knew what he was.

"You've heard of him?" Will raised an eyebrow.

Hannibal tipped his chin, "I've read about him."

"He killed a nurse at the hospital," Will explained. "He set her up like a previous Ripper murder."

Hannibal's mouth formed a thin line in distaste. He couldn't stand it when others took credit for work that wasn't theirs, especially if it was his own. Abel Gideon was lucky he was behind bars because if Hannibal had access to him he would certainly teach him a lesson.

“I doubt the Ripper would repeat any of his crimes.”

“That’s what I thought too. Though it was compelling that he knew the wound pattern of the Rippers kill well enough to repeat it. It wasn’t in the press. But then I realized that Frederick Chilton had access to that case.”

“You think Dr. Chilton may have pushed him into thinking he is the Chesapeake Ripper?” Hannibal wouldn’t be surprised. Frederick Chilton was nothing if not obsessed with attention. And having the Ripper in captivity would certainly give him that.

“I do. He probably genuinely thinks Gideon is the Ripper. But he is ignoring glaring holes in the story.”

“Like how the murders of his family do not fit the Chesapeake Rippers typical modus operandi.”

Will nodded in agreement. “And the fact that the nurse died from a single slice to the jugular and not mutilation like the Ripper’s victims.”

“He was missing key details.”

“Details I am certain Dr. Chilton wouldn’t have thought were relevant.”

Hannibal smiled a little at Will’s distaste for his colleague. It seemed he did not like Dr. Chilton any more than Hannibal did.

Chilton’s business card had been sitting in Hannibal's rolodex for some time now. But similarly to his situation with Franklyn Froideveaux, Hannibal could not kill him without drawing attention to himself. Despite that he wondered if Will would be pleased if he served him Chilton’s tongue. Decidedly not. Or maybe *not yet*.

“Have you told Jack?”

“No, I haven’t really had the chance. Though I’m certain he suspects it as well.”

“It’s likely,” Hannibal agreed. Jack wasn’t a fool and Frederick Chilton was fairly easy to read. “Are you going to tell him about the missing time?”

Will looked down at his cup. “No. Not until I’m certain what’s going on,” he paused. “Are you going to tell him?”

“Not unless you want me to. I have no interest in reporting everything you tell me to Jack. I trust your judgement.” This was a half truth. He wasn’t going to tell Jack because he would much rather see what would happen than have Jack send Will back to waste his beautiful mind in a classroom.

“I don’t think he’d be very happy to hear that. We both know he hired you to keep an eye on me.”

Despite the progress, Will was still wasn't very trusting. "I told Jack that I would let him know if I thought you were unfit for fieldwork, nothing else."

"Thank you," Will murmured.

"You're my friend Will. I wouldn't betray your trust."

Will smiled softly at that, brushing a stray hair off his face. "So you don't think I'm unfit for fieldwork?"

"You have done nothing to suggest to me that you are a danger to yourself or others."

Will laughed a little. "Haven't I?"

He didn't have a quick retort to that. Will was right of course. Under normal circumstances Hannibal would have had him pulled from fieldwork the moment he started talking about his hallucinations.

"You are not crazy. But you are under a lot of stress. Our bodies have clever ways of telling us to stop while we are ahead. This lost time appears to be a trauma response. Whether or not you choose to listen is up to you."

"What do I do if I think I'm going to black out again?"

"I have an exercise that might be of some use to you."

"Okay," Will said hesitantly.

"Repeat after me. It is 11:31pm. I am in Baltimore Maryland. My name is Will Graham."

Will's eyes widened when he heard the time but repeated the phrase anyway. "It is 11:31pm. I am in Baltimore Maryland. And my name is Will Graham."

Hannibal smiled approvingly. "Good. I want you to think of this exercise as often as you can. You don't have to say it out loud but you can if it helps."

"Probably a better strategy than kissing Alana Bloom," Will laughed and Hannibal found himself laughing too.

"You'll tell me if you lose time again won't you?"

"Of course," Will replied.

Hannibal stood up to collect Will's empty cup and bring it to the kitchen. The fire had all but burnt out from his inattention though the hot coals still provided the room with a dim light. He looked over and noticed that Will had stood up as well.

"I should probably head home. There was snow in the forecast and I want to get back before the roads get slick."

Hannibal thought about offering Will his spare bedroom but decided that would probably freak him out. Instead he walked him to the door, insisting that Will at least take one of his coats which he of course refused.

“Drive safe,” he cautioned as he watched Will walk out onto the dark street towards his car. Hannibal waited to close the door until he saw Will’s car pull away.

For weeks the two of them continued on like that. Meeting at the office or occasionally at Hannibal's home for dinner. Will had a couple cases out of town during that time and when he was gone Hannibal found himself missing his company. This was particularly odd as Hannibal had always been perfectly content to entertain himself. There were people that interested him and people that didn’t but there was very rarely anyone he actually cared for in any capacity. If he ever needed to socialize, there was always a list of people waiting to fawn over him and his cooking. But for some reason he specifically desired the presence of Will Graham. Hannibal had an inkling as to what this feeling was but he pushed the thought from his mind as much as he could.

Mostly he spent his time like he usually did, meeting with patients during the day and socializing at night with the occasional consultation for the FBI on the side. That was until one cold winter afternoon, when inspiration finally struck. It had been well over two years since Hannibal had left a scene for the FBI. It was time to bring back the Chesapeake Ripper.

*****

Henry hauled his groceries into the house and plopped them on the counter. He usually liked to carry everything on one trip so he cursed when he realized there were way too many bags and he would have to go back outside to get another load.

Henry liked going to the grocery store in the evening. There were less people there and he could take his time without feeling suffocated by children running around screaming as their mothers did very little to stop them. Unfortunately this meant that during the winter, his 8:30pm grocery runs happened in the dark.

He slammed his front door behind him and shoved his hands into his pockets to fight off the cold. He should’ve worn gloves but was too stubborn to dig a pair out if he was only going out for a minute to grab the groceries.

Luckily he was able to carry the rest of the groceries on his second trip and wouldn't need to take a third. This meant he had to do an awkward balancing act to keep the groceries from falling while he closed the trunk but it was worth it to not have to go back another time.

When he entered the house something didn’t feel right. The groceries were still on the counter where he left him and nothing seemed out of place yet a chill ran up his spine.

He thought about going to his bedroom to grab his gun but decided not to. There was no actual reason for him to be so afraid all of a sudden.

He shook his head to clear the thought and put his second load of groceries on the counter next to the ones that were already there.

He began putting away all the food that belonged in the fridge and soon he forgot about his troubles entirely. In fact he became so focused on the task at hand that he could barely even feel it when the needle plunged into his neck.

When Henry woke up he was disoriented. His vision was blurry and it took a moment before his eyes were able to adjust to the darkness of the room. When they did he realized he was in some kind of basement, strapped down to some kind of strange metal contraption.

He tried to pull his hands free to no avail.

It was then that he heard the noise of someone walking down the stairs. From the angle he was at he couldn't see the person walking towards him and couldn't turn his head as it was restrained.

"You're awake," a man's voice echoed. He had a thick accent that Henry couldn't place. Probably European.

When the man finally stepped into view he immediately recognized him but wasn't exactly sure where from. He was wearing some kind of plastic suit that Henry might have thought was comical if it weren't for the fact that he had kidnapped him.

"Who are you?" Henry screamed, uselessly struggling against his restraints.

The man tilted his head and smiled, "you don't remember?"

Henry squinted trying to place where he had seen the man before. The realization hit him like a train. "This isn't because I backed into your car is it? That was months ago. And it was just a scratch!" he exclaimed.

"It's terribly rude to drive away from an accident," he chided, smiling even wider exposing his slightly crooked teeth. The man seemed to find this whole absurd situation hilarious.

Henry's eyes flicked across the room looking for something, anything, to help him escape. A few feet away was a table that was covered in surgical tools but he had no way of reaching it in his current state.

"What do you want from me? Money? I can pay you. Please just let me go."

The man just clicked his tongue. "You may want to relax. This will hurt a bit." He plucked a scalpel off of his tray and took a few slow steps towards Henry.

"Help!" he screeched. "You're a fucking freak. Let me go!" Henry used his last bit of strength to struggle but there was no use.

The man took the scalpel and made an incision in his stomach. Henry screamed as he felt the blade pierce his skin. The wound was not all that deep yet it still set every one of his nerves on fire. He heard the man grab another tool but did not look up to see what it was. He would rather not know.

Henry could feel him use whatever tool he had grabbed to peel back his skin. He cut it off in small strips seemingly savouring every moment of agony Henry felt.

Henry had no idea how much time had passed since the man had started. All he knew was that his entire chest had been flayed open. His last thought was a prayer to God that he would let him live to see another day. Then the world went dark as the pain was finally enough for him to pass out.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for the long wait between updates. I'm still here I promise. I got COVID so it has been a stressful couple weeks but I'm all better now. Thanks for the continued support! Also this story has officially passed the minimum length for a novel which is wild. It isn't even halfway done. I hope you are still enjoying it!

Chapter 11

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will slipped his hands under his glasses and rubbed his eyes with the palms of his hands. He was exhausted after having barely slept for several nights in a row.

He had just gotten back from Chicago, having stayed there for over a week working on a case where a serial killer had been murdering prostitutes. Naturally, he had nightmares that kept him from sleeping longer than an hour or two. And of course, he couldn't fall asleep on the plane either. The whole flying metal object hurtling through the air thing wasn't exactly conducive to sleeping.

He grabbed his luggage off the conveyor belt and started on his way home. He was only ten minutes away from Wolftrap when he got a call from Jack Crawford.

"Hello?" Will answered. Pause. "Jack?' "Hello. Yes. Sorry. I'm here," Jack stumbled. He took a deep breath. "Will I know you must have just gotten back but-"

"Whatever this is, it can wait until I get some sleep," Will interrupted rudely. He found it much harder to practice socially acceptable behaviour when he was tired. Not that he worried that much about social conventions even when he was awake.

"It can't wait," Jack said firmly.

Will grumbled in disapproval. He didn't care about what Jack wanted. He'd been hauled back and forth across the country constantly lately and he wanted nothing more than to have a day to rest with his dogs.

"It's the Ripper Will."

Will perked up a little at that. But then the realization set in that Jack had now taken him to multiple crime scenes which he insisted the Ripper committed. "Thee Ripper?" He asked sarcastically. "Are you sure it isn't just another one of Dr. Chilton's playthings? Or maybe another back alley surgery gone wrong?"

To Will's surprise, Jack didn't chastise him for the comment. Instead he simply said "yes."

Will froze for a moment. "Give me the address and I'll be there as soon as I can." The humour in his voice had disappeared.

Jack gave him the address and he turned around to head towards Baltimore.

It took him a little under an hour to get there. But it didn't even feel that long. His heart pounded in his chest and for the entire duration of the drive he was unable to make a coherent thought. He knew Jack was grooming him to solve the Ripper case but part of him thought the killer might never strike again.

The crime scene was in an unfamiliar part of town and he got turned around twice while trying to find it as he was very distracted by the looming presence of the Ripper in the back of his mind. Maybe subconsciously, he was delaying his arrival.

When Will got to the crime scene, he was surprised to see that it was towards the back of a grocery store parking lot. This wasn't the usual kind of location for a Chesapeake Ripper murder. He normally stuck to less trafficked areas where it was easier to stage a complicated tableaux without being noticed.

Will stepped out of his car to survey the scene. The weight of the gun on his hip still felt unfamiliar. He had gotten his certification to carry it a few weeks prior but still wasn't used to having it again. All the same, it made him more comfortable at the crime scene and he felt less like the scruffy weirdo who shows up and solves crimes while simultaneously being the most awkward person in the room. Of course he still was those things but that fact bothered him slightly less now that he had a gun on his hip and looked a little more like he actually belonged there.

In the parking lot, there were several FBI SUVs and a few more cop cars. The crime scene was sectioned off and there were a few officers standing guard. A small crowd had formed, leering over the scene looking to see what all the fuss was about.

Will caught a glimpse of a mop of red curls bouncing around the group and felt himself cringe. Maybe if he was lucky she would leave him out of her story.

In the middle of the scene sat a small blue sedan with a man sitting in the driver's seat. It looked almost normal from a distance but as Will ducked under the crime scene tape, he realized it was far from it.

The man sat naked and unmoving in the driver's seat. Dead. But that wasn't the most interesting thing about him. The most interesting thing was the fact that the man appeared to have no skin.

The body almost didn't look real. It was more like an anatomical portrait than an actual person.

Will felt a chill run up his spine and was unable to tell whether it came from the cold weather or the state of the body just a dozen or so feet away.

He walked over to where he saw Jack and the three lab techs talking.

"He was found by a woman and her two kids," Will heard Zeller say as he approached the group.

"That must've been quite a scare," Price added. He glanced at Zeller with a lopsided smile.

Beverly nodded at Will in acknowledgement when she saw him before looking back over at Jack. "The body has been here all day. It took hours for anyone to notice something was wrong."

It made sense. From a glance nothing appeared to be out of the ordinary. It was only when one walked close, that they saw the horrors within that vehicle.

“The skin isn’t the only thing that’s missing. It appears our killer took the liver and kidneys as well,” Zeller added.

“It looks like the Ripper Jack,” Beverly commented. She looked at Will for confirmation but he pretended not to notice and stared at the rims of his glasses instead.

Jack frowned. “I don’t want to jump to any conclusions here. If it’s the Ripper I want to be sure.”

“Oh it’s the Ripper alright,” Will said evenly. It was painfully obvious to him. If someone asked him how he knew, he wasn’t sure if he would be able to explain it. He just *knew*.

“Well for once we agree,” Zeller said humorously. Will ignored him.

“This place is a lot more public than usual for the Ripper.” Price gestured toward the crowd who were standing on their tiptoes to try and get a look at the body.

“Do you think he’s escalating?” Beverly asked no one in particular.

“No,” Will deadpanned. “He wanted his return to be a big deal. He wanted to make sure it was publicized.”

“At a place as populated as this someone must have seen something. There’s no way the Ripper could’ve hauled a body out here without anyone noticing,” Zeller stated confidently.

“I wouldn’t be so sure,” Will muttered. “Didn’t Beverly say the body had been here hours before anyone noticed? And that was in broad daylight. There’s no way someone would’ve seen it in the dark.”

“Alright,” Jack said gravely. Will could tell he was already beginning to feel defeated. “Everyone clear the scene!” Jack shouted, and all of the lab techs and cops milling around stopped what they were doing and backed away from the car to make way for Will.

Will plucked his glasses off of his face and placed them in the breast pocket of his shirt. He closed his eyes and slowly exhaled out of his nose as the pendulum swung back and forth.

Swish. Swish. Swish.

Will stood over a surgical table, hands carefully dragging a scalpel below the skin, slowly peeling it back, making sure to get an even layer. He was an expert in this. It came to him like second nature. His skills had been refined over many years.

You are nothing more than a pig to me. Less than human. Utterly useless until I came across you.

He relished in the screams of the dying man in front of him. It was like music to his ears.

I enjoy your suffering. You don't deserve to walk this earth after how you've wronged me. This world will be a better place without you.

The screaming stopped. The man finally passed out due to the pain.

You were nothing when I found you. Now I will elevate your body to art. You shall be immortalized forever in my image. This is my design.

Will blinked a few times before jamming his glasses back over his nose. The biting winter wind grounded him back to reality. He was hyperventilating slightly. This crime scene affected him more than most of the others he had seen. It wasn't because it disturbed him but because there was recognition there. Something about the killer's mindset spoke to him. He reasoned that it was because he had spent a lot of time studying previous Ripper cases and not because he had some kind of connection to the Ripper.

"Will?" Jack asked cautiously to check if Will was back in the present.

Will cut straight to the chase. "It's him," he said firmly. There wasn't much room for doubt. Not this time.

"Why now? After all this time, what set him off?" Jack's tone was even but Will could still sense the man was unsettled.

"I don't know," Will replied honestly. He didn't think there was anything different about this victim. He didn't seem particularly special compared to the killer's other victims. But there had to be some sort of reason for him to kill again after his hiatus. Of course, there were theories that he hadn't stopped killing and had instead travelled somewhere else to continue his work. This was an interesting concept and Will couldn't exactly rule it out completely but it felt unlikely. Others suggested the Ripper might have gotten ill or had a stint in prison but Will seriously doubted these theories. The Chesapeake Ripper was an intelligent psychopath and would not be arrested for any sort of petty crime. That Will was sure of.

"Well there has to be a reason. Someone as calculated as the Ripper wouldn't come out of hiding for no reason."

Will agreed with this. Nothing the Ripper did was meaningless, but whether or not Will could decipher this meaning was yet to be determined.

"Everything he does is a performance. It's theater."

Jack gave him a look. "Okay who is he performing for?"

Will thought about it for a second. "You Jack. The FBI. He's toying with us. The high traffic location means this is bound to get a lot of press. And we both know how frustrated the media is with the FBI for not catching him yet."

Jack nodded. "And after all the press on Abel Gideon, the Chesapeake Ripper wanted to prove he's still out there."

Will agreed but there was something else to it. Something he was missing.

Jack noticed that Will had nothing else to add. “Alright, I’m sending you home. Knowing the Ripper, another body could drop at any minute and I need your mind sharp. Get some rest,” Jack told him. He was right of course. And the time was ticking until the window closed and the Ripper would go back into hiding. But Will did not go home.

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Franklyn shifted uncomfortably in his seat. The room wasn’t all that hot but he found himself sweating profusely under all the layers of clothing he had put on. How Dr. Lecter looked as if he hadn’t broken a sweat was a mystery.

The psychiatrist was like that. He seemed untouchable. More than human. Dr. Lecter could be placed in any number of situations and still look just as comfortable as he did in his office. Franklyn wished he could be the same. He was always uncomfortable or awkward anywhere he went.

“What is it you would like to talk about today, Franklyn?” Dr. Lecter asked. He sat across from Franklyn in the opposite black leather chair and looked rather effortless, leaning back in his chair with one ankle crossed over the other.

Franklyn felt a lump in his throat. Usually he spent his sessions trying to get to know Dr. Lecter better. To perhaps instill himself as a friend. But today Franklyn had something else rather troubling on his mind. “My friend Tobias…” He trembled slightly, looking away from the psychiatrist in embarrassment. “Has been saying some rather dark things recently.”

“Such as?” Dr. Lecter implored after jotting down a quick note. Franklyn cringed a little at the sound of the pen on paper. He hated when Dr. Lecter took notes on him. It reminded him that he was here as a patient and not a friend.

“He told me he’s been thinking about killing someone,” Franklyn admitted. “I think he was just joking but he’s been making these kinds of jokes a lot. I’m worried. I think he might be a psychopath,” Franklyn muttered, anxiously tugging at his sleeve.

“What makes you say that?”

Franklyn blushed slightly as he realized what he was going to have to share with Dr. Lecter. “I’ve been trying to put myself in your shoes lately. To see people how you see them and imagine how you might diagnose them.”

“You’ve become a psychoanalyst.” Dr. Lecter uncrossed his ankles and set his notepad and pen on the side table next to him.

“Do you think he’s a psychopath?”

“I am not here to diagnose Tobias. This is your hour Franklyn, I am here to treat you. I am willing to discuss Tobias but only on how your diagnosis of him reflects on you.”

Franklyn felt a sinking feeling in his stomach. “Do you think I’m a psychopath?”

Dr. Lecter's lips quirked slightly upwards at that as if he found it funny. Franklyn was just glad that the tension in the room seemed to lift a bit. “You are not a psychopath. But I think you may be drawn to them.”

Franklyn nodded. “It’s just that I don’t know why he’s telling me these things now. Tobias is my best friend but I know I’m not his,” he confessed.

“Does that trouble you?”

Franklyn uncrossed his own ankles in an attempt to mirror Dr. Lecter’s position. He read somewhere that mirroring people makes them subconsciously like you more. “It does and it doesn’t. Of course I wish that I was his first choice but honestly I’m grateful he considers me a friend at all.”

“You often find yourself seeking friendship from those you see as superior,” Dr. Lecter observed.

It was true. Franklyn often found himself seeking out exceptional people. “I would be satisfied just knowing I could reach out and touch greatness.”

“Is that what you get out of your friendship with Tobias?”

“I would say so. He’s a wonderful musician and a genius by all accounts. But lately I’m not so sure. There's something dark inside him.”

“Do you believe he actually intends on killing someone?” Dr. Lecter leaned forward in his seat, intrigued by what Franklyn was telling him.

“I don’t know. I’m always wrong about these kinds of things.”

It was true. Franklyn had a tendency to assume the worst. More often than not, he ended up embarrassing himself in these situations.

“If you do, I have a responsibility to report it,” the doctor told him.

Franklyn absorbed this information. Tobias wouldn’t hurt anyone would he? This had to be his anxiety getting the best of him. “Probably not.”

The rest of the therapy session continued as normal. When Franklyn stepped into the waiting room to leave, he saw another man sitting on one of the leather seats.

Franklyn had never seen another patient of Dr. Lecter’s before and was surprised to see one now. The man had to be a patient and not any kind of personal acquaintance. He was rather disheveled and odd, which is certainly not the kind of company Franklyn assumed Dr. Lecter would keep.

Though it was odd that he was here when it was clear Dr. Lecter typically scheduled his clients in a way so they would not run into one another.

Franklyn attempted to catch the man's eye as he walked past, but it was as if he didn't even notice Franklyn was there at all.

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"Will," Hannibal prodded gently.

Will blinked a few times as if he had just woken up from a trance. "Where am I?"

"My office," Hannibal replied swiftly. He hadn't exactly been expecting Will but he wasn't surprised that he showed up after the Chesapeake Rippers grand return.

Will rubbed his eyes. "I don't remember getting here."

"What is the last thing you remember?"

"I was at a crime scene. Jack told me to go home." Will stood up from his seat and drummed his fingers anxiously on his thighs as he breezed past Hannibal into the office.

Hannibal admired Will's presumptuousness to waltz into his office without invitation. Luckily he didn't have any other appointments today and could spend the rest of his afternoon with Will.

"It appears you have lost time again."

Will shrugged. "Interesting that when I do I manage to find my way here."

Hannibal fought a smile at that. *Interesting indeed*. "In times of great stress we often seek comfort from those we trust. Your subconscious mind seems to lead you here."

"I'd rather not lose time at all," Will muttered before collapsing into his usual chair.

"There is another exercise we can try that may be of some use to you."

Will looked up at him skeptically, eyebrows raised. Hannibal took note of the way Will's eyes looked from beneath his lashes and added the image to his ever growing collection. "Okay," he said softly. *So agreeable*.

"I want you to draw a clock face, numbered, with the long hand pointing to the minute and the short hand the hour." Hannibal walked over to his desk and plucked a notebook and fountain pen from where they sat neatly and handed them to Will.

Will took the pen and pad cautiously, briefly catching Hannibal's eyes as he did so before quickly looking away and flushing slightly as their fingers brushed. "Why?" He asked.

"It's an exercise to ground you. I want you to think of the present moment." Hannibal walked over to the seat across from Will and sat down, instantly feeling the stretch of distance between them. Hannibal had recently been pushing the two chairs slightly closer together for their sessions but pulled them apart again whenever he had a session with Franklyn as he preferred to be as far away from the man as possible. Regrettably, since he had not been

expecting Will, he hadn't had time to move the chairs back. Hannibal wondered if Will could feel the distance as well.

Will sighed but did as he was told, drawing a clock face on the notepad. "I'm in Baltimore Maryland it is 4:32 pm and my name is Will Graham." Will handed the pen and notepad back and Hannibal noted that he did so in such a way their fingers would not brush.

Hannibal flipped the notebook around and inspected the drawing. As he expected the clock looked as if it were shattered, numbers falling outside the lines with a complete lack of spatial awareness. Recently he noticed a peculiar scent on Will, an almost putrid sweetness radiated off of him. Hannibal thought it may be encephalitis and this drawing all but confirmed that. Of course he was going to get Will treatment, but first he could use this intriguing circumstance to his advantage.

Hannibal closed the notepad and set it on the table beside him. "Tell me about this case Jack has you working on."

Will ran his palms along his thighs and rested them on his knees. "It's the Ripper. He's back."

Hannibal raised his eyebrows in false surprise. "What makes you so sure?"

"Organs are missing, the body is posed and on display, there is an element of artistry. These are all elements of Ripper cases."

"Surely not only the Ripper murders have these elements?"

"That's true but the kind of surgical precision it takes to strip skin from a man takes years of practice. This was not a fledgling killer. He was experienced. And the only killer I've ever heard of with such precision is the Chesapeake Ripper?"

"Is that all?"

"That and…" Will took a deep breath. "There's a certain feeling Ripper murders elicit. They have both horror and intrigue. There's a certain amount of subtlety there too. He could make them more brutal and horrifying but instead there's a level of refinement to them."

"A monster with morality?"

"Actually I do think he has a sense of morality. Or at least he thinks he does. He doesn't see his victims as human. To him it's no different than slaughtering a pig."

Hannibal leaned forward yet again surprised by the direction this conversation was headed. "Is it all that different? Pigs are highly intelligent and emotional creatures not so dissimilar to people."

Will smiled. "Society can only function properly if we can all agree on a set of rules. The number one rule arguably being not killing each other."

"Are there not some people deserving of death?"

Will thought about that for a second, leaning back into his chair. “Arguably there are a few.”

“Then would it be so amoral for someone to kill them?” Hannibal knew he was pushing this line of thinking a little far but he was so curious as to what Will would think. It was dangerous to expose himself in this way but Hannibal found that he didn’t care.

“By all accounts Henry Morgan was an asshole, but that’s not enough justification to kill someone, Hannibal.”

Hannibal felt a little spark at the mention of his name. Will had only ever referred to him formally. He could sense Will was thinking the same thing as his eyes widened slightly but Hannibal spoke before Will could take it back. “Perhaps it is enough justification for the Chesapeake Ripper.”

“I think so. He thinks he’s more sophisticated and smart than any of us. That’s why he is so enamoured with taunting the FBI. He wants to prove he’s superior.”

“Well he certainly has given Jack Crawford the runaround.”

“He certainly has. I’m not sure he’ll ever be caught. An intelligent psychopath like that is something I’ve never seen. The only way we catch him is if he slips up. And I don’t see that happening.

Hannibal agreed with Will on that point. He would never be caught. “He sounds like something out of fiction,” Hannibal commented.

“It’s as if he is. I must confess, there is a part of me that hopes he never gets caught. I don’t want the illusion to be broken. To see him as simply a man and not something more.”

Hannibal wished he could savour this moment. He would crack Will’s skull open and delight in the taste of his thoughts if it didn’t mean he couldn’t have him anymore. He imagined what it would be like to trace Will’s features. To brush his fingers against Will’s defined cupid's bow. “You speak of him so reverently. Some might say lovingly,” Hannibal teased.

Will smiled and huffed out a small laugh. It was genuine, which Hannibal found to be rare coming from Will. “It’s my empathy. I’m able to put myself in the minds of all the killers I hunt. It allows me to find them. Catch them. But they stick with me. I can see the world through their eyes.”

“It must be difficult to see such darkness and be able to appreciate it while also having to contend with your own morality.”

Will shrugged. “Compartmentalization helps.”

“Possibly. Though with your recent state of mind I’m not entirely sure that’s true.”

Will’s eyes widened slightly as if a realization had dawned on him. Quickly he schooled his features into a casual lopsided smile with a level of precision that Hannibal thought might nearly be on par with his own ability to control his expressions. Will looked down at the floor and then back up at Hannibal. “Maybe that’s something I should work through in therapy.”

Chapter End Notes

I apologize for the little hiatus I went on. Restrictions recently lifted where I live and I admit I have spent all of my spare time seeing old friends and doing all the things I used to love before lockdown. I didn't feel particularly inspired to write but I've got my inspiration back and really enjoyed writing this chapter.

Chapter 12

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will rounded the corner of the auditorium to see a body placed center stage on a chair. Normally this wouldn't be cause for the FBI to get involved in an investigation, except for the fact that the neck of a cello was jammed down the man's throat which was expertly cut to reveal vocal cords. In addition to this, there was a large wound on the torso and the intestines were removed.

Will rubbed his eyes to be sure what he was seeing was real. When he opened his eyes again it was still there. Lately he couldn't be sure everything he saw was really there.

He was called in on the assumption that this was the second in the most recent series of Ripper murders. All the pieces were there, it wasn't much of a leap.

The man turned musical instrument was rather portly and wore a tailored suit not too dissimilar to something Will might see Hannibal in. Of course it wasn't exact, one couldn't replicate Hannibal's specific taste if they tried.

As he got closer Will had a sinking feeling that he recognized this man. He couldn't place the face but it was vaguely familiar. He brushed off his concern and figured the recognition came from the suit and Will's association to Hannibal. Still he couldn't quite shake the feeling and decided he would come back to it later.

"He's getting bolder." Will practically leapt out of his skin before he turned around to see Jack standing directly behind him.

"Theatre," Will said simply gesturing to the room around them proving his point from the previous case.

"I guess you hit the nail on the head with that one," Price called out from the stage where he was inspecting the body.

In tandem, Will and Jack climbed up onto the stage to join the forensic techs in inspecting the body.

"There's rosin on the vocal cords. I think our killer tried to play him like an instrument," Beverly commented. "The cords were treated the same way you would treat cat gut string. This guy knows his stuff."

Zeller raised his eyebrows giving her a confused look.

"I played violin as a kid," she shrugged with a lopsided smile.

"The incision on his lower abdomen is messy which is practically unheard of in Ripper cases." Price glared at the body deep in thought.

Zeller nodded, picking up where Price left off. “It seems like he was in a rush. Maybe he was interrupted.”

“So there may be a witness?” Jack asked hopefully. It was a little too reminiscent of the conversation they had during the back alley surgery case.

“I doubt it. The Ripper doesn’t leave much to chance. He’s a professional. If the incision is messy it’s not him.” Will hated to contradict the team for what felt like the hundredth time but it was true. The Chesapeake Ripper took too much pride in his work to do a sloppy job.

“Not this again,” Zeller moaned. Will ignored him.

Beverly gave Zeller a look. “I hate to be the bearer of bad news but Will is usually right about these things Z.”

Will stepped up to the body and took off his glasses. The rest of the team took this as a cue to back up and the rest of the people on the scene followed suit.

Swish. Swish. Swish.

I’ve waited a long time for this moment. I’ve spent years perfecting my craft in private but it is time to show the world what I can do.

He lifted a bow to the cut vocal cords and began playing. The sound it produced was unlike anything he had ever heard. It was haunting, yet beautiful the way the sound filled the empty auditorium.

I am not doing this for just anyone. I would be content to play in private if not for the inspiration of another. This is an homage to a fellow artist. A gift.

He tilted his head back and closed his eyes listening to the unique sound filling the space around him.

This is my design.

When Will opened his eyes again, he was back in reality. He placed his glasses back on his face and hurried out of the auditorium to find Jack. When he did he watched as the rest of the team walked back into the theatre to finish up their work.

“Anything useful?” Jack questioned.

“Whoever did this has killed before, but never like this. The rest of his victims will be missing persons. This one however is special.”

“And why is that?”

“This wasn’t random. He isn’t the Chesapeake Ripper but I think he was inspired by him. This piece was dedicated to him. It’s why it is so similar in tone and portrayal of the Ripper murders. He feels grateful to the Ripper for triggering this evolution.” A copycat. While this killer clearly intended to impress the Ripper, Will thought the opposite would be true. He

could imagine the original to be less than thrilled that another was literally *ripping* off his work.

“Do you think the Musician knows who the Ripper is?” Hope practically bled out of Jack’s voice.

“If he doesn’t already he will soon. The Ripper will seek him out.”

“So the Musician is the key to catching the Ripper. If we find one we’ll find the other.”

Will nodded. “I think the musician knows the victim as well. He wanted this to be sentimental.”

“We might really catch him this time.”

“Maybe,” Will agreed.

*****

Hannibal was less than thrilled when he opened Tattlecrime to find that once again the FBI had falsely attributed some other murder to him. It turned to outright anger when he opened the photos attached to the article and saw the victim of this crime was none other than Franklyn Froideveaux.

He was very much looking forward to taking care of Franklyn himself one day and now that was taken away from him. On top of this, Hannibal's association with Franklyn will certainly draw some amount of scrutiny from the FBI. This murder was practically a neon sign pointing directly to him.

It was now too risky to go ahead and continue with the rest of the series of murders he had planned as the Chesapeake Ripper. This was particularly aggravating as the dinner party he had planned was only a few days away. There wouldn't be enough meat and he would have to supplement with actual animals.

The thought of the dinner party aggravated him further when he remembered the fact that Will Graham had declined his invitation to it. Half the reason he began a new series of Ripper murders was to have Will attend his party and consume the very people he was trying to save. It was rude even for Will. Of course Hannibal knew Will was antisocial at the best of times but he had hoped their relationship had progressed enough for Will to make an exception for Hannibal. Apparently it hadn’t. At least Franklyn’s death would allow Hannibal to cancel the party under the guise of grief.

He was able to cancel the rest of his appointments for the day for the same reason. The only one he didn’t cancel was his standing appointment with Dr. Du Maurier. It would be suspicious to cancel an appointment with his psychiatrist when he was supposedly healing from the traumatic loss of a patient.

This left him with a few free hours to do some investigation of his own into the death of Franklyn. Luckily he knew exactly where to start. It was time to take up Tobias Budge’s offer

of new strings for his harpsichord.

Chordophone String Shop ended up only being located a few minutes drive from Hannibal's office. When he entered the small shop he heard the beautiful sounds of a violin coming from another room. As not to disturb the player, he reached up to silence the bell at the entryway.

Hannibal walked into the shop as quietly as he could while still listening to the music. When he rounded the corner Hannibal saw Tobias Budge was the one playing. They locked eyes and Tobias removed the bow from the strings and set both pieces down on a small stand beside him.

"I apologize. I didn't hear you come in." Tobias sounded pleasant when he spoke but in an almost artificial way.

Hannibal smiled, matching the man's tone. "I didn't want to disturb you from playing. Is that an original piece?"

"It certainly is. Do you compose Dr. Lecter?"

"I do from time to time."

"If I remember correctly you were intending to visit me to get your harpsichord restrung?" Tobias asked with a raised eyebrow. Hannibal could tell he was tense from the way he held his hands at his side but his face remained neutral.

"Yes," Hannibal replied swiftly. But he wasn't here just to restring a harpsichord. No he was here for answers. So he pushed. "I was quite surprised to find your shop open today, given the circumstances."

Tobias looked down at the floor before quickly flicking his eyes back up to Hannibals. It was a small moment of weakness but did not go undetected. "If I'm being honest Franklyn and I weren't as close as he made us out to be," Tobias said casually, almost too casually to the point of seeming rehearsed. "But I could say the same thing about you, doctor. Visiting a string shop on the day your patient was found murdered."

"I always found Franklyn rather distasteful if I'm being honest. This way I don't have to find him another psychiatrist." Tobias' eyes widened slightly, he was speechless and clearly uncomfortable with the direction of the conversation so Hannibal kept pushing. "He did mention to me earlier this week that you had told him you were thinking of killing someone. What an odd coincidence that he ended up murdered only a few days later."

Hannibal expected Tobias to excuse himself but instead he smiled showing teeth. "So Franklyn gave you my message."

"Why did you kill him?" Hannibal asked bluntly. As much as he loved talking around murder, leaving enough room for plausible deniability, he wanted answers.

"Well if *I'm* being honest I had originally intended on killing you."

A lesser man would have stiffened at that but Hannibal remained calm as ever. One does not spend the majority of their adult life murdering people in artful displays without learning to become unphased by declarations of intent to kill.

“And what made you change your mind?”

Tobias’ smile widened almost imperceptibly. “I followed you one night. All the way to a lonely grocery store parking lot.” He raised his eyebrows at the implication.

Now Hannibal really was shocked. He had lost the upper hand. Of course he didn’t let it show on his face but he was concerned. “You’re playing with fire Tobias. You’re going to be caught. And you are not only putting your own life at risk but now mine as well.”

Tobias’ eyes flashed. “When they come for me I’ll just kill them.”

“Save yourself, kill them all,” Hannibal remarked. It was a poor plan but one he could work with.

Tobias’s smile was sinister, “exactly. You know why I chose not to kill you?” He asked.

Hannibal was interested in this line of questioning. “I can’t say that I do.”

“It’s because I’ve never met anyone else like me. Like us.”

It sounded like Tobias was seeking *friendship* from Hannibal. This was something he hadn't considered. After all, he had always worked alone. Before he could formulate a response, the doorbell rang and an older woman walked into the shop seemingly oblivious to the tension around her.

“Good day Tobias.” Hannibal walked back towards the entrance. Tobias Budge would need to be dealt with. Soon. But for now he had other matters to attend to.

Hannibal pulled up at Dr. Du Maurier’s house right on time. This was something he insisted on. Never too late and never too early. It was only polite. Bedelia, ever the gracious host, poured him a glass of wine before they sat down at their usual spots.

He was angry. This was rare for Hannibal. Yet apparently it was noticeable even to Bedelia.

“Your person suit is slipping,” she commented.

“I always try to attend to personal matters as carefully as I can but today I found out I was not being as careful as I thought.” That was one way of putting it. Somehow Hannibal had been followed to the scene of his tableau. He had always been so cautious yet he had nearly been caught. What if it had been a civilian or an FBI agent? Or even Will Graham? This time he was lucky but next time he may not be. The worst part is he had no one to blame but himself.

“Always so secretive. Have you considered our conversation on meaningful friendships? It would help to open up.”

“I’m here to open up,” Hannibal said with a charming smile.

“But I am not your friend. I am your therapist.”

“I met someone recently.” Bedelia raised a brow. “He is shockingly similar to me. We share a passion for music as well as some of my other more *niche* hobbies.”

“I’m glad to hear there is a real potential for friendship in your life.”

“Unfortunately I came to discover that I do not want to be his friend. My attention lurks elsewhere, with someone many would consider to be my opposite.”

Bedelia sighed ever so slightly, she knew exactly who Hannibal was referring to as he had become a topic of conversation in Hannibal's last several sessions with Bedelia. “I’m growing concerned with your interest in Will Graham. I believe it is beginning to cloud your judgement.” She brought her wineglass to her lips elegantly.

Anger flared in Hannibal’s stomach once again. “I’m simply intrigued by his capacity for empathy.”

“I think your interest has grown into an obsession. He’s your patient Hannibal. Not your friend.”

Hannibal sat silently for a moment. He was very rarely at a loss for words but they had escaped him. He had always been convinced he would never be caught. Hannibal imagined being famous long after his death simply for the fact he was never found. But now he was nearly caught by some lesser killer. He had been so distracted by what Will might think of his newest creation that he did not take the proper measures to ensure he wasn’t being watched. “Of course” was all he could manage to say.

Hannibal thought about how reckless he’d been with Will. If he wasn’t losing his mind with encephalitis he may have caught Hannibal already.

Bedelia seemed fascinated by the slip in his mask and only dug her hooks in deeper to see how he would react. “This kind of patient psychiatrist relationship will not end well. You’re risking your career.”

Hannibal was risking much more than just that. He’d never risked anything in his life before yet here he was wrapped up with the FBI all because of an interest in an agent. It was foolish. How had he not seen that?

There was one thing Bedelia was wrong about though. He had no personal stake in Will Graham. He didn’t *care* for him. He couldn’t. His interest was simply in Will’s mind. His empathy and the darkness that lay beneath the surface. If Will died tomorrow he wouldn’t be upset, he would simply be disappointed in the inability to study the man. In fact he could prove it, if to no one else then to himself. Tobias did say he would kill any police that came after him.

There were two ways it could go. Will would kill Tobias, taking care of Hannibal's problem or Tobias would kill Will, taking care of Hannibal’s other problem. It was a win-win or at least that’s what he convinced himself.

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Will felt a little odd knocking on Hannibal's door after his appointment was canceled earlier that day. But when he found out the man dead at the symphony was Hannibal's patient, Will felt compelled to check on him. That's what friends are for. But when he got to Hannibal's imposing front door he nearly got back in his car and drove all the way back to Wolftrap.

Instead he knocked and held his breath until Hannibal opened the door. It was always odd seeing the psychiatrist dressed down, even if what he was wearing would be considered dressed up on Will.

"Will," the doctor greeted.

"I'm sorry for dropping by unannounced it's just that-"

"It's alright. Come in," Hannibal interrupted, which was odd considering the man was usually obnoxiously polite. What was even weirder however was how Hannibal stepped back to let Will into the house. Usually he would only step back just enough that Will could barely get by. In fact Will found whenever Hannibal had an opportunity to, he would stand just a little closer to Will than he was comfortable with. So now the distance between them felt especially pronounced. Hannibal must have been more affected by his patient's death than he let on.

Hannibal offered Will a glass of wine which he accepted graciously though typically Will drank whiskey when he was there (other than with dinner of course.)

They sat in their usual spots and of course the conversation went straight to murder and mayhem as it always seemed to with the two of them.

"Did the Ripper strike again?" Hannibal asked.

"Surprisingly not yet," Will answered before sipping his wine in the way he'd watched Hannibal do at least a hundred times. "A different killer though equally as extravagant. A musician trying out a new instrument." Hannibal's jaw clenched slightly and Will realized he had referred to his dead patient as an instrument. He wasn't tactful at the best of times but this was especially bad. There's a reason he didn't have many friends. "I'm sorry I shouldn't have said that. He was your patient."

"He was." It was rather dismissive which Will thought was out of character. He cursed himself for slipping up like this. Though to be fair it's hardly the worst thing he's said in Hannibal's presence. But at least there was a certain level of detachment to the other murders they discussed.

"It must've been…" Will paused searching for the right word, "tough to see that on Tattlecrime." Will may have been gifted with exceptional empathy but he still had an incredibly tough time with sympathy.

Will looked up at Hannibal but almost recoiled when their eyes met. Those eyes had always had a certain warmth to them when Will looked at them. Now they were cold and impersonal,

almost reptilian in their detachment. This was why Will hated eye contact. His empathy allowed him to read too much into people's eyes. He could often read emotions off of eyes alone and it was overwhelming. The apparent lack of emotions Hannibal's eyes portrayed made Will sick to his stomach. Had he upset Hannibal? Certainly the death of one patient couldn't have this much of an effect on a man who used to be a surgeon who saw death every day. Maybe there was something else going on that Will didn't know about. He was tempted to ask but thought that might further aggravate his host.

"There is something I must tell you though it borders on the edge of doctor patient confidentiality."

Will leaned in slightly, interested. "I'll be discreet."

"In our last session Franklyn told me that a friend of his had mentioned killing someone. At the time I determined it was not a serious threat so I didn't report it. But now that Mr. Froideveaux is deceased, I'm afraid it may be pertinent to your investigation." Will felt some relief. At least Hannibal still trusted him enough to tell him this. "His name is Tobias Budge. He owns chordophone string shop just a few blocks away from here," Hannibal continued.

"I'll interview him. I should be able to on the grounds he owned a string shop. Our killer would know a lot about the treatment of catgut string. I won't have to mention you at all." Will was surprised at his own urge to lie for Hannibal. He hadn't asked him to. But Will didn't want to drag Hannibal into this any more than he already was. If Will mentioned Hannibal's tip to Jack he'd have to make a formal statement and possibly testify if the case ever went to trial.

"Thank you for your discretion Will."

Will felt like he should leave. He was intruding after all and it was clear Hannibal didn't want him there and was only being polite by letting him in. At least he had a lead. "Alright, I'm glad I stopped by. Call me if you need anything. Or even if you just wanna talk or something."

Hannibal smiled but his expression was still cold. "Thank you. Have a good night."

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Tobias smiled when he heard the ringing of the door bell of his shop. It had been a slow day so far and he was grateful to have customers. When he turned the corner to greet whoever had just walked in, his smile faltered. There were two uniformed officers standing in the entrance as well as a man in plain clothes that Tobias recognized from the news as the FBI agent (or not agent) Will Graham.

"Hello, is there anything I can help you with?" Tobias asked as politely as he could. He had no idea how suspicion had found him already but he was determined to either kill them or throw them off his trail.

"Yes actually. We are investigating a murder that happened recently at a local symphony and were wondering if we could ask you a few questions." The officer framed it less like a

question and more like a command but Tobias was paying more attention to Will Graham who was staring straight through him.

“I’m familiar with the case. I found it especially odd that someone tried to play the vocal cords like they would a cello. Please, come in” Tobias gestured toward the inside of the shop and the men walked in. The FBI agent was looking around the room, Tobias thought he might be cataloging everything he saw to come back to at a later date. It was no use, everything Tobias kept up here was perfectly normal. Will was certainly odd but was well known for catching killers. Tobias had to get rid of him.

Will’s eyes snapped to Tobias “tried?” He asked.

“Yes, tissue needs to be treated before it can be played. I’m afraid our killer could not get a sound out of his victim.” Tobias hoped the impersonal phrasing would keep them from asking if Tobias knew Franklyn.

Will pushed up his glasses. “The vocal cords were treated like cat gut strings.” The man said simply. And Tobias gave him an interested nod. “Those details were kept out of the press,” Will muttered under his breath.

The interview continued under the guise of asking Tobias about his expertise about string instruments. They were careful not to suggest they were suspicious of him in any way but Tobias could still tell they were. Every now and again Will would interrupt to ask a seemingly random question before they continued on with the interview.

Tobias was starting to wonder whether or not Dr. Lecter had mentioned anything about Tobias to the police when out of nowhere Will practically shouted, “do you guys hear that?”

The officers looked at one another before looking back at Will. “I don’t hear anything,” one of them said and Tobias agreed. There was nothing to be heard except the normal sounds of Baltimore traffic. But Will wasn’t convinced. He was looking around the room almost manically.

“I need some air,” he muttered before abruptly walking out of the shop.

Tobias saw this as an opportunity and grabbed a sharp pair of scissors and slit the throat of the nearest police officer before he even knew what hit him.

“Hey!” The other officer shouted, drawing his gun. But Tobias had already run around the corner and down the stairs into his basement where he created his own string out of human bowels.

Tobias knew he had the upper hand as he had specifically designed the layout of the basement to be as confusing as possible. He knew every inch of it by heart. The same could not be said as he watched the bumbling officer walk towards the back of the basement and towards a sink. Tobias came up behind him as silently as he could before wrapping a thin metal cord around the mans neck.

Tobias strangled him before he could get a single word out. He threw the body headfirst into the large metal sink and closed the plastic curtains behind him. Just then he heard movement from upstairs and resumed hiding in his original spot, still gripping the metal wire.

All things considered, Tobias was pretty impressed with his ability to kill two officers without either of them firing a single shot. Two down and one to go. And the one that was left was clearly mentally unstable. This would be a piece of cake.

Will walked down the stairs with his gun drawn. He was trembling and Tobias figured he wouldn't be able to shoot him even if he got the chance. Much like the other officer, Will made a beeline towards the sink. It was obvious there was a person back there but Will likely thought it was Tobias.

Will opened the plastic curtain and paused momentarily at the sight of the body. Once again Tobias snuck up behind him and poised the metal wire, ready to strangle. Unfortunately Will seemed to catch onto this plan and was able to put his arms up in between his neck and the wire before Tobias could strangle him. A struggle ensued and Tobias was surprised to find Will Graham was stronger than he looked.

A shot fired next to Tobias's ear and he was dazed as his ears began to ring. The same could be said for his opponent and Tobias took the opportunity to get away. Will fired a few more shots but it was too late. Tobias managed to get out alive.

He would have of course preferred to have killed all three officers that entered his place of employment that day but two was impressive enough.

As he ran out into the daylight he realized he had a great deal of blood on his shirt. That and the fact he had left his winter coat inside. Tobias checked and figured out the blood was coming from his ear. Apparently he had been hit by the shot Will fired next to his head and the shell of his ear had a large round chunk taken out of it. No matter. He knew where he would be headed next. Luckily the office of Doctor Hannibal Lecter was only a few blocks away.

Chapter End Notes

This one was a little angsty but I hope you like it! I'm thinking we are nearing the halfway point. Thank you to everyone who has kept reading. I really appreciate it. Especially since this is my first time writing fanfic. Once again sorry for the gap between updates. I'm back at university now and am super busy but don't worry I haven't forgotten about this fic.

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!